

are you?" "How dare you bring them in here? He

I was aware that I was raving, clutched in the toils of debauch, as a drunkard must feel when he takes another another drink, but, like the drunkard, I could not stop. Like the drunkard with his drink when he can no longer smell or taste it, I was not thinking or hearing the words my voice was saying – I was conscious only of poison pouring out of me as the drunkard is conscious of spurious comfort pouring in through his gullet. It must have been a bestial exhibition; but it broke down at long last into exhausted sobs and tears which ran hot down my face and gathered in a pool at my throat because I had not the energy left to raise a hand to wipe them away. I became conscious of the touch of linen on my face and looked up at Twice, silent, absorbed in the plying of his handkerchief. Lying on the bed beside me was the oxydized metal vase, a large dent in its plump green belly. I laid my hand on it.

"It says ha-home sweet ha-home!" I sobbed.

"Aye, so it does, and it is quite right. This is more like the thing. I like to see a little life about the place . . . Now I'm going to get some water and we'll have a dram and a nice quiet chat and see if we can remember what it was that we had all that row about. We haven't had such a rowdy one since the day you hit me over the head with the file of papers in the office and I've never even known how that one started either." He fetched a jug of water, poured out two tots of whisky, diluted them and brought the glasses over to the bed side. "Why *did* you suddenly hit me over the head that day? I could see no reason for it and it struck me as being most damnable unjust."

"You made a crack about me being a good housekeeper."

"What was wrong with that?"

"Wrong with it? I wanted to marry you more than anything in the world and I thought you didn't like me and were being funny with me. God, I was mad!"

"So was I!"

"You called me a Highland vixen and shook me."

"There was nothing wrong with that either. I like Highland vixens and enjoy shaking them, up to a point."

"That was the part that you didn't tell me that day – that you liked Highland vixens." I took a sip from my glass.

RETURN TO PEYTON PLACE

For the millions who read PEYTON PLACE—the astonishing first novel which was alternately praised and viciously attacked, Grace Metalious returns in this her second book to the characters she created with such devastating honesty.

RETURN TO PEYTON PLACE describes what happens when Allison MacKenzie writes a novel about people and events in her own home town—a novel which (like PEYTON PLACE) becomes a world best-seller and is made into a major Hollywood film.

The people of PEYTON PLACE move again through the pages of this sweeping story and Grace Metalious with the skill and uninhibited vitality of a born story-teller makes them seem so real that the reader is caught up in the tangle of their lives.

l the distance to his home is 'a wee bittie to the east' – west, as the case may be. If, a mile away, there lives someone that you do not like, that person is 'that craitur that lives at there Dinchory way' and the distance to his house is 'way west yonder and a devil of a bad road'. As if this were not confusion enough, Reachfar space can be conquered, in time, by a news transmission system which leaves the African push telegraph – not to mention Reuter or the Post Office system – at a standstill, so it came to be known that 'the lights were coming in' to Reachfar at a certain time on a certain evening, and from three hours before that time and onwards the 'neighbours', in defiance of all normal space and time, began to gather. Long before dusk the whole house and the grass patch in front of the door and most of the farmyard were seething with people, and every flat surface in the kitchen and entrance passage was piled high with baskets of all sorts, containing gifts of food and drink. The neighbours were bent on a party, from Sir Torquil down to Old Hamish the Tinker, who had been made 'respectable by the Government', and now, instead of roaming the country in a small cart and camping where he could, lived with his wife, Old Cripple Maggie, in a concrete bungalow to which he referred as 'a hoosie wi' a library'. It had taken even the quick-witted Twice a little time to discover that the paper contained in Hamish's library was neither incunabula nor modern books, but a toilet roll. . . . But that is by the way. What I wished to convey was that the coming in of the lights to Reachfar was like the visit of the coal boat to Achcraggan when I was a child, in that everybody was there.

About an hour before the ceremony was due to take place Tom was visited by the appalling thought that he might depress the switch and nothing would happen.

"That," he told Twice quietly in a corner, "would be making a man look terrible foolish."

"But I will know whether the light is there or not," said Twice.

"Will there be a noise or anything?"

"No."

"All right, lad. I'll trust what you say, but it is a-all ve mysterious and is enough to be making a man supersteetio and be believing in witches and MacAbers like the c people would be doing."

indifference carefully, in the very beginning, for she had known that she would need something to hide behind.

"In a little while," Lewis had warned her, "say when *Samuel's Castle* gets close to the hundred thousand mark, it is going to become fashionable to pan the hell out of it."

"But I don't understand," Allison replied. "The first reviews were good. Not raves, exactly, but good."

"That was in the beginning," said Lewis. "But there are a lot of phoney people in the world. They are the ones who 'discover' people, places and things and can't bear to keep their mouths shut about how clever they've been. But the minute that the great unwashed public begins to share their enthusiasm, whatever has been discovered is no longer palatable to the discoverers. Then they backtrack." Lewis imitated the voice of one of them. They always sounded like victims of some terrible fatigue. "Capri used to be *the* place to go, my dear. But lately it's simply too full of the most undesirable types."

Allison laughed. "And is that what they will say about *Samuel's Castle*?" she asked. "That it used to be a good book but now it's become so dreadfully common?"

Lewis's face wrinkled in disgust. "I've listened to them at a thousand cocktail parties," he said. "And believe me you can't fight them. They are the opinion makers and they have got themselves into positions of power."

"I'm not their sort," Allison had said. "They won't waste their valuable time on me."

"They may," Lewis said. "And if they do, it can hurt."

"Don't worry about it, Lewis," said Allison.

But it began to happen as he had said it would. The indication that Allison had of it was when a reviewer who had written a favourable review of her book wrote an article in the same magazine when the movie rights were sold. "Century Films have bought the rights to the sexy *Samuel's Castle*. All we can say is that Hollywood must be a lot more hard up for material than usual."

Allison was stunned. She began to overhear conversations at parties and in theatre lobbies.

RETURN TO
PEYTON PLACE

GRACE METALIOUS



UNABRIDGED

PAN BOOKS LTD : LONDON

sports shirt on which palm trees swayed across his chest, casting their shadows on beautiful Waikiki Beach which stretched across his stomach—believes walking is too slow, and thinks he can make a great movie out of this incredibly dull and unimaginative script.

After five minutes of walking, the ordinary world of ordinary buildings was behind them. Allison felt like Alice; the world had gone topsy-turvy. Next door to a crumbling southern mansion was the façade of the palace at Versailles; and when they left those behind, they walked down the main street of a small town that Hollywood, by using it so often, had made the American people (and half the world) believe to be typical. Six cowboys wearing green eye shadow, their lips rouged, loped past them, their horses' hoofs clattering on the asphalt road.

When they left the typical small town Allison saw, on her right, an artificial lake. A rowboat with three wet actors was being tossed about by high waves. From a tower, a voice called, "Okay. Turn off the storm." The wind machines stopped; the storm ended; the actors stepped out of the boat into the knee-deep water and waded ashore.

"When you see that on the screen," Arthur said, "you will be certain it was filmed on the open seas. And if the director is good and the producer is imaginative and the actors right, you will believe in the plight of that shipwrecked trio."

They came to a Western town. There was the dusty main street, the sheriff's office, the saloon, the general store, the wood sidewalks. Allison expected at any moment to see Gary Cooper, tall and lean, cautiously move out of the sheriff's office.

Arthur pushed open the swinging doors of the saloon and they went inside. Sunlight filtered through cracks in the roof; the long mirror behind the bar returned their images. Seeing herself, Allison had the feeling she was out of place and out of time, an interloper in the American past.

She sat down at one of the tables. Arthur leaned against the bar.

Roberta and Harmon up for life. Roberta has not needed much persuasion to put Harmon's idea to work. She married Dr Quimby and he re-wrote his will in her favour, and then she and Harmon settled back and waited for the old man to die. They didn't have long to wait. Peyton Place made life intolerable for Dr Quimby. The town rocked with laughter, and people who had always gone to him with their ailments now assumed that he had turned senile and refused to consult him.

Roberta and Harmon cuckolded him openly, and in the end the old man put his revolver into his mouth and blew his head off. Within a year, Roberta and Harmon were married and had begun the long fight to become accepted by Peyton Place. With time and new-found respectability they had won to a degree. Of course, there were those who remembered and talked, but with every passing year the story grew less and less interesting and there were always new people in new situations to be gossiped about.

It helped a great deal, too, when Roberta and Harmon's son, Ted, turned out to be such a nice guy. So the scandal died and was almost buried, and people forgot. But Roberta Carter did not forget. She remembered very vividly how she had fought to become someone who was looked up to in town as a good wife and mother and an asset to the community. Now there was Jennifer, who threatened to turn Roberta's son from the paths of righteousness with her insane, abnormal sexuality.

I've got to get rid of her, thought Roberta.

But during the past year she had thought up and discarded hundreds of plans. Nothing worked. Ted was as much a prisoner in his marriage to Jennifer as he would have been in a maximum security cell at Alcatraz. Jennifer was crazy and she would make Ted crazy, and in the eyes of most of Peyton Place it was a far greater crime to be insane than it was to be a thief or a rapist.

I've got to get rid of her, thought Roberta.

But it was not until after the end of summer that Roberta decided on a course of action that she had previously dis-

BOOK ONE

1

SOMETIMES, WINTER comes gradually to northern New England so that there is an element of order and sequence to time and season, and when the first snow comes it is not surprising because it has been expected for quite a while. When winter comes that way, it usually begins to snow big, fat flakes at mid-morning and by noon there is a lovely thick edge of white on everything. The skies clear after lunch and the sun comes out and by the time school is out in the afternoon all the eaves on all the houses in town are dripping melting snow.

Then the old-timers say, "'Twon't stay. Not this time. Not yet."

And everyone who is still young enough is disappointed and a little apprehensive because maybe it's really true that old-fashioned winters have left northern New England forever.

Old-fashioned winters usually happen after hot, dry summers. Then the fall rains begin right after Labour Day and they are cold, wind-driven rains that are grey and destructive, and after those rains there is no beautiful autumn, no glory of red and gold and leaves. The trees turn quickly from green to withered brown and the rain cuts the leaves from the branches in fast, vicious swipes. After the rains, the ground freezes hard and quickly and one day is like the next, cold and grey and waiting for the snow.

Then it begins. A fine powder that sifts down from the dark sky in a seemingly unending screen and refuses to accumulate on streets and roads until after the wind has had enough of blowing, and cold, dry piles of white have gathered around the base of every fence, post and tree. By

supper-time the wind dies down and still it snows, so fine and thin that children are afraid it will take forever for enough of it to fall to cover the palms of their mittened hands.

But those who are older remember other old-fashioned winters. They are the ones who check the gallon gauges on oil-burner fuel tanks, who have long since made sure that their car radiators are full of anti-freeze, and who know that with the coming of tomorrow's dawn, the wind, too, will return.

Fireplaces do not exist in the houses of northern New England purely for their friendly, hospitable hearths. They are there because every once in a while there is an old-fashioned winter and power lines break like dry straws in the face of the wind and snow. Those who remember have small, wood-burning stoves in their cellars to keep water pipes from freezing; every wood box is filled and overflowing with logs and kindling, and the young sit in front of blazing fires and wax their skis and wonder what the accumulation will be at Franconia by morning.

That was the way winter came the second year after Allison MacKenzie returned to Peyton Place. It was four o'clock on a November afternoon, and Allison was standing in front of the window in her bedroom when she saw the first flake of snow.

Perhaps it will be tomorrow, she thought. Maybe tomorrow Brad will call and say, I've sold it, Allison, I've sold it; your novel has been accepted and will be published in the spring.

TUTTLE'S GROCERY Store was located on Elm Street, Peyton Place's main thoroughfare, at a point half way between the Citizens' National Bank and Prescott's Pharmacy which stood on the corner of Maple Street. From the front window of Tuttle's, the old men who hung around the store in the winter could look out and see the courthouse and the benches where they loitered when the weather was warm and fair. During the summer, Tuttle's was something of a tourist attraction, for it was one of the few remaining stores in northern New England where you could buy Cheddar cheese by the slice or by the pound from Ephraim Tuttle's enormous cheese wheel. Tuttle's still sold rock candy and liquorice drops by the pennyworth, and a nickel would buy a fat pickle, sour enough to set your teeth on edge, from a huge barrel that stood in a dark corner at the back of the store.

Right after Memorial Day, every year, Ephraim Tuttle made his yearly concession to what he called the 'summer trade'. At that time he brought brightly-coloured bolts of gingham and calico up from his cellar and lined them all in a neat row on his front counter as had his father and grandfather before him in the days before readymade clothing. Once in a while, someone bought a few yards of material to make curtains for a summer camp, but otherwise the bolts of fabric stood on the counter until after Labour Day, when Ephraim sent them off to Ginny Stearns to be washed and ironed and then rewound to be stored in plastic coverings in Tuttle's cellar for another winter.

"Waste of space," said Clayton Frazier, "settin' all that cloth right up there on the front counter that way. Nobody ever buys nothin' to speak of."

"Lends the place a tone," said Ephraim. "Summer folks like tone. What they call *atmosphere*."

But with the coming of fall, Tuttle's reverted to what it had always been—a rather dusty, very old sort of general store where you could buy almost anything, if you were able to find it. This jungle of merchandise included magazines and cough drops and car plugs and old sun glasses; tomatoes in a cellophane package and fish by the pound on Fridays only; eggs that you took from a carton yourself and put by the dozen into a paper bag; deerskin work gloves and pipe tobacco, Alka-Seltzer and lollipops and the Sunday papers. In the fall, Ephraim shut off the two circular ceiling fans that had whirled around slowly all summer and set up his pot-bellied wood and coal stove, but it was not until he took down and put away the awning which shielded his front window all summer long and began saving wooden packing crates suitable for sitting purposes, that the old men who occupied the benches in front of the courthouse knew that it was time to move across the street to wait for winter.

"Gonna snow," said Clayton Frazier. "Gonna snow sure'n hell."

"'Bout time," said one of the old men who sat with his feet upon the base of the stove. "November. And we all knew it was gonna come early this year."

"Foolishness," said Clayton and sat down on the one wooden chair that was reserved for him. "I've seen it cold as this many a time and it never snowed 'til clear into January. But it's gonna snow today. Sure'n hell."

"Don't snow in hell, Clayton," said another man and waited for a chuckle from his friends.

"How d'you know, John?" asked Clayton Frazier. "Been there lately?"

And then the men around the stove did laugh and Clayton leaned back happily and lit his pipe.

The front door of the store opened suddenly, letting in a sweep of cold air that immediately stifled all conversation around the stove. Clayton Frazier looked up at the stranger who had entered, and the only way that anyone could have known that Clayton was upset was that he kept his

pipe out of his mouth when everyone around the stove could tell that he hadn't drawn on his pipe anywhere near long enough to be satisfied with its glow.

"Ephraim!" said the stranger.

Ephraim Tuttle looked up slowly. "Ayeh," he said. "What can I do for you?"

"Ephraim," said the stranger and laughed. "For God's sake, don't you remember me?"

Everyone around the stove knew who the stranger was, but not a man moved to make an acknowledging gesture.

"I'm Gerry Gage," said the stranger, still laughing and now clapping Ephraim Tuttle on the shoulder. "S.S. Pierce Co., out of Boston. Don't you remember? It was me that remembered about bringing that Navy fellow back to town, the fellow that was murdered by his own daughter. Remember me now?"

"Stepdaughter," said Clayton Frazier and put his pipe into his mouth.

"Well, whatever she was," said Gerry Gage. "Anyway, it was me that remembered."

"Ayeh," said Clayton.

There was a silence, and the stranger rubbed one of his gloved hands over the edge of his briefcase.

"Well," he said at last. "What do you need, Ephraim? I've got your usual list here, and I could go by that."

"The usual," said Ephraim.

Gerry Gage was suddenly angry. "Listen here," he said, "I only did what I thought was right. I never meant to do anything in the first place. I just happened to mention something about a fellow I let off here in Peyton Place. A hitch-hiker. How did I know I was talking to the sheriff? It was him that started everything. All I did was what I thought was right. That's all."

Sheriff Buck McCracken glanced at Gerry Gage. "Whyn't you do the business you come for," he said, and he did not ask it as a question.

Gerry began to make check marks next to the items listed on a slip of paper in his hand.

"No need for any of you guys to hold a grudge against me," he said. "A man doing what he thought was right."

"Ain't nobody in Peyton Place holdin' a grudge against you that I know of, Mr. Gage," said Clayton Frazier. "It's just that some people talk a God-awful lot, and that does get tirin'."

"Believe me," said Gerry Gage, "I know exactly what you mean. Believe me, in my business I meet a lot of talkers. But then, it takes all kinds to make a world," he added, as if he were the first man ever to have noticed this.

"Ayeh," said Clayton.

"By the way," asked Gerry. "After all that murder business and all, I asked to be transferred off this route. And I was, too. The company understood. I mean, about all the notoriety and all. I haven't been back this way since the cops dragged me back to answer a lot of questions about Lucas Cross."

Nobody said a word, and as the seconds passed, Gerry Gage became more and more uncomfortable.

"Well, anyway," he said finally. "What's new in Peyton Place? I haven't heard much about this neck of the woods since all that stuff about the murder quieted down in the papers."

"Nothin'," said Clayton Frazier.

"What?" asked Gerry.

"Nothin'," repeated Clayton. "There's nothin' new in Peyton Place. Seldom is. Nothin's different at all."

And to the uneducated eye of a stranger it would have appeared that Clayton Frazier's words were true. Peyton Place looked as it had always looked—pretty, quiet and untouched by turmoil. In the late winter afternoon the lighted windows of the shops and houses presented friendly, innocent faces to each other and the rest of the world.

The war was over and the Harrington Mills no longer throbbed in twenty-four-hour shifts straining to fill the demands of Army contracts, but that was true of factories nearly everywhere. Leslie Harrington still lived alone in his big house on Chestnut Street, and while time and the loss

of his only son, Rodney, had aged and gentled him a little; he was still Leslie Harrington, a fact of which everyone in town was still very much aware.

Down the street from Leslie, Dr Matthew Swain still practised medicine and his friend Seth Buswell still wrote editorials for the Peyton Place *Times*. The house of Charles Partridge was as empty as it had ever been, for neither time, nor acquisitions, nor the lawyer's wife, Marion, had been able to fill it with any degree of warmth or love. None of the old families had moved away, and no new people had moved into town, leastways, as Seth Buswell put it, not enough of them to shake things up or to amount to anything.

No, nothing much had changed in Peyton Place. At least, nothing that anyone was willing to pour into the ears of a stranger. And if there had been changes in private situations and in individuals, surely these changes were the concern of those to whom they had happened and, again, nothing for the ears of a stranger.

Nope, thought Gerry Gage as he left Tuttle's Grocery Store and climbed into his car, nothing new in Peyton Place. Hell, that girl killing her old man was probably the only big thing that ever did or ever will happen here.

Gerry Gage drove his car down Elm Street towards the highway that led to White River and was, as he put it, damned glad to be heading for a town where there was a hotel with a bar, where other salesmen gathered and where there was something to talk about, drinks to be bought, and jokes to be told.

In The Thrifty Corner Apparel Shoppe on Elm Street, Selena Cross finished covering a counter top full of blouses that were on sale. Then, looking up, she saw a flake of snow flatten itself and spread against the windowpane. She left the counter and walked towards the front window of the shop to make sure that what she had seen was really a snowflake, and as she looked she noticed a car with Massachusetts licence plates heading towards the highway to White River. She wondered briefly, as people will in a town like Peyton Place, just who from out of state was visiting whom,

but then Gerry Gage's car was out of sight and Selena thought no more about it.

It really is snowing, she thought. I'll have to hurry home to Joey.

She glanced up again as another snowflake fell against the window and saw two hurrying figures cross her line of vision. For just a second, her heart thumped hard and then she turned quickly away from the window.

Outside, the two figures turned quickly into Maple Street and were out of sight.

"Hurry, darling," said Ted Carter to the girl whose arm he held, "I don't want my wife to freeze to death during her very first winter in Peyton Place."

The girl laughed up at him. "Remind me to buy a pair of flat-heeled shoes tomorrow. I can't keep up with those long legs of yours when I'm wearing high heels. I saw a shop back there—Thrifty something—I'll go there tomorrow."

Ted Carter did not laugh with his wife and his steps grew even more hurried.

"They don't sell shoes at the Thrifty Corner," he said, and, holding tightly on to his wife's arm, he tried desperately not to think of Selena.

SELENA CROSS had just started to turn off the lights in the store when the front door banged open and Michael Rossi came in.

"Hi, Selena," he called. "In the words of us natives, 'It's gonna snow, sure'n hell.'" He brushed at the shoulders of his overcoat where the snow had already left a fine, white dust and he stood there and grinned at her.

"Hi, Mike," said Selena. "How's Connie?"

"Fine," he answered, "and I have strict orders to bring you home with me. Connie always makes hot-buttered rum for everyone on the day of the first snow. Come on, get your coat. The car's right outside."

Selena turned her eyes away from him. "I can't," she said. "I've got to get home to Joey. It's snowing."

"Selena," said Mike, and his voice was very gentle as he put his hand on her arm, "come with me. It'll be all right. When I saw that it was going to snow, I told Joey to go right to our house from school. He's there now, with Connie and Allison. Come on, Selena. It'll be all right."

She looked up at him, her eyes darker than ever, dark with remembered fear and horror and pain.

Mike Rossi picked up her coat and helped her into it. There was in his way of doing this something of the bullying gentleness of a nurse with a convalescent patient.

"Come on," he said. "You're staying for dinner, too. I'll drive you home, afterwards, if you want to go."

Selena's hands fumbled blindly with the buttons on her coat and as they left the shop she tried the front door carefully before she followed Mike to the car.

Time had been good to Michael Rossi. His shoulders were still broad and straight under the dark cloth of his coat, and, if there was a slight thickening at his waistline,

it was only his wife who knew of it and laughed at him in the privacy of their bedroom.

"Is my Greek god getting a little old and paunchy?" Constance teased, and smiled at him in a way she knew he found challenging.

He took her hands and pressed them against him. "Paunchy, eh?" he said, laughing. He smiled into her eyes, returning her challenge.

"Showoff," she said. "Always strutting around like a bantam rooster."

Constance broke loose from him and made a dash for the bathroom, but she was not fast enough. He grabbed her again and held her tightly while she struggled, laughing, against him.

"I don't strut," he said. "Take it back or you'll rue the day."

"Never, never, never," cried Constance, and squealed and kicked when he began to tickle her, his hands moving all over her body.

Her struggles loosened the belt of her robe, and he stripped the garment from her.

"Stop it!" Constance yelled. "Stop it at once!" She tried to sound severe but did not succeed.

As Mike kissed her his fingers began to unbutton her pyjama coat; then he slowly pushed the coat off her shoulders and she let it slide down her arms and fall to the floor. His hand found the tie of her pyjama bottoms, he eased them over her hips until they slithered down around her ankles. Then he lifted her up and out of the crushed circle of pink silk and carried her to the bed.

"You are nothing but a big horny Greek, Mike," she said, and was surprised to hear how her voice shook. I sound like a frightened bride, she thought.

His lips brushed against her nipples, his mouth caressed her. "And you," he whispered, "are nothing but a pure and innocent Peyton Place housewife."

"What are you going to do about it, Mike, an old man like you?" she said, her voice slow and teasing.

"I shall corrupt you," he said, and when he bent towards her again her body twisted and she flung her arms over her head.

When it was over he held her in the curve of his arm, and she felt protected from the whole world and safe against all its dangers.

"You're never the one to go to sleep first," she murmured drowsily against his shoulder.

"It's ungentlemanly," he replied. He stroked her hair and smiled in the dark. "Besides, only old men go to sleep on their women."

Constance sighed, and just before falling asleep she said, "Everybody knows Greek gods never grow old."

Mike kissed her gently and thought, There is nothing in life that's better than this, lying beside the woman you love, in your own bed, in your own house.

The house was still the same white, green-shuttered house that it had always been, and, in spite of Mike's marriage to Constance, the townspeople still referred to it as 'the MacKenzie place'.

"Don't let that bother you, darling," Constance had told Mike. "Long after everyone thought I'd become a MacKenzie, they still called this house 'the Standish place'. Don't worry. It'll happen. One day, everybody'll say 'Rossi house'."

"I should live so long," said Mike ruefully.

Mike had gone to Leslie Harrington who knew more about real estate than anyone in Peyton Place.

"Listen, Leslie," he had asked, "what do you think Connie's house is worth?"

"Connie's house?" asked Harrington. "What the hell are you talking about, Mike? You and Connie and Allison aren't going to leave town, are you?"

"You ought to learn to mind your own business, Leslie," said Mike. "But if it's any satisfaction to you—no, we aren't about to leave town. Now, how much is Connie's house worth?"

"Well," Leslie hedged, "real estate values went up

the war and all. But Connie's house, well taken care of as that's always been—let's see. Hm-m, well, I'd say, off hand, mind you, that I'd go eighteen five on it."

"Jumping Jesus!" roared Mike. "Eighteen thousand five hundred dollars! Where the hell do you think you are? Downtown Dallas?"

Leslie Harrington leaned back and smiled. "Nope," he said, "but if I was Connie, I'd never take a nickel less."

Mike had gone back to Constance and said, "Darling, will you please sell me your house for, God help us all, eighteen thousand five hundred dollars?"

"What ever in the world for?" she asked, puzzled.

"Never mind why," he told her. "Just will you?"

"Yes," she said.

Mike took every cent he had managed to save and made a down payment on Constance's house. Then he borrowed the rest and finished paying for it. And when everything was done, he held the new deed, with his name on it, in his hand.

"Leslie," he asked. "Is it my house now?"

Leslie Harrington leaned back and smiled. "Yes, Mike, it is. And Connie got a good price, too, even if I do say it myself."

"Well, if it's really mine, I want to give it away as a gift," said Mike.

The chair in which Leslie Harrington had been leaning back fell forward with a thump.

"What the hell are you talking about?" he asked.

"It's my house," said Mike, "and I want to give it to Connie for her birthday."

"Well, of all the goddamned foolishness I've ever heard of," roared Leslie, "this beats it all. You didn't have to buy the goddamned thing. We could have changed the deed to read so that your name was on it. You didn't have to go through all this nonsense."

"It wouldn't be the same," said Mike.

So it was done, and Mike brought the new deed home to his wife and it read: KNOW ALL MEN BY THESE PRESENTS,

That I, Michael Rossi of Peyton Place, State of New Hampshire, for the sum of one dollar and other good and valuable considerations to me in hand paid by Constance Standish MacKenzie Rossi of Peyton Place, State of New Hampshire, do hereby give, grant and convey to her, her heirs, successors and assigns forever, in fee simple, absolute, all that certain tract of land, with the buildings and improvements thereon, situate in Peyton Place, State of New Hampshire.

Constance burst into tears. "You nut," she wept. "You didn't have to go through all that nonsense."

But her tears were tears of pride and happiness, and she held her husband very tightly.

"Thank you, darling. Thank you."

"Well," said Mike and grinned down at her. "It's nothing to cry about. Listen, do you think people will start calling this the Rossi place now?"

Constance went to the sideboard and fixed a drink for her husband.

"Nope," she said cheerfully. "They won't. Not for a while."

She took a sip from his glass before she handed it to him.

"But I'll know, darling," she said. "I'll call it the Rossi place for the rest of my life."

And now Mike's car drew up to the house he had bought from his wife and given to his wife. He looked at it with proprietary eyes. It had never seemed to him his own until he had given it to Constance. What made it his was that he had earned the right to give it away.

"Here we are," Mike said, and Selena's head jerked around, her eyes frightened and startled. His voice had brought her back to the reality of Peyton Place. In her thoughts she had been worlds away. Only daydreams now could protect her from the horrors of memory.

She walked up the path in front of the MacKenzie place and the front door opened quickly, revealing Allison's delighted smile.

"Selena!" cried Allison MacKenzie. "For heaven's sake, we've been waiting and waiting for you to get here. Hi, Mike," Allison put up her cheek to be kissed, "did you bring the milk?"

"Yes, my darling daughter," said Mike and slapped Allison on the behind. "Now everybody inside. It's cold and it's gonna snow, sure'n hell."

"Hello, darling," said Constance, and came to put her arms around her husband and then Selena. "Come on in. Shut the door. Listen, I've got the most divine brew brewing. If you have just one cup of it, you can't possibly catch cold. It's my own secret potion, handed down to me from my great-great-grandmother, who was a witch. Guaranteed protection against head colds and malignant spirits." She put her hand on Selena's arm.

Selena Cross looked across the room to where her brother, Joey, sat waiting for her. The living-room was bright and warm. The blaze from the fireplace cast warm dancing shadows on everything.

"Come and sit down, Selena," said Constance.

Selena stood in the doorway of the living-room and Joey stood up.

"Hi, Joey," she said.

"Hi, S'lina," said Joey. "It's snowing."

"Yes, Joey," said Selena. "It's snowing."

There was a little pause, and neither Mike, Constance nor Allison then could find anything to say. Selena's presence had, for a moment, brought the darkness of unhappiness into that light, gay room. They shared her pain, they stood around her like bodyguards fearful of assassins. They could think of nothing to say that would release Selena from the strain of memory and the pain of loss. Finally, Mike broke the tension.

"Good weather for a hot buttered rum," he said. "And, as for you, Joey, I've got a dozen Cokes with your name written all over them."

Selena held Allison's hand, and finally she sat heavily and gratefully on a chair by the fire.

Thank you, she cried inside herself. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you for still loving me. You are the only people who care.

It was not the kind of love she wanted most, but it was better than nothing.

IT WAS a little after eleven o'clock that same night when Mike Rossi stopped his car in front of the Cross house, and Selena and Joey got out.

"I'll come in with you, Selena," said Mike. "I'll help Joey to get a fire going."

Selena stopped him with a gesture of her hand. "No, thanks, Mike," she said. "We'll manage. Thanks anyway."

Mike did not insist. "All right, then."

"Run up ahead and turn on some lights, Joey," said Selena, and when her brother had gone she turned back to Mike. "Goodnight," she said. "And thank Connie for me again. It was kind of her to have us. Tell her it'll be my turn next time."

"Any time, Selena," said Mike. "You know that. Good-night."

Selena waited until he had turned his car around and headed for his own house before she walked up the path to her front door.

"I started a fire," said Joey.

"We'll have some hot chocolate," said Selena.

"And a game of chequers, Selena."

"It's too late, Joey. School tomorrow."

"Not if the snow keeps up all night."

"All right," Selena said, relenting, and went towards the kitchen. "I'll be right with you."

Would it be better if we talked about it? Selena wondered as she heated milk. But what words did one say to alleviate a horror-filled memory?

The first time it had snowed after Lucas Cross's death, Selena had not realized, at first, what was happening to her. It had been late afternoon, she remembered, when it started. It had begun as it did today, with the first snowflake flatten-

ing itself against the front window of the store. Selena had watched it and suddenly she had been filled with an unreasoning, all consuming panic. She had run to the telephone and called Constance Rossi.

"I'm closing the store early," she told Constance, unable to keep her voice from trembling.

"Selena! What is it? Are you ill? I'll be right there."

"No. No, please, Mrs MacKenzie," cried Selena. "It's just that it's snowing and I have to get home to Joey."

"Quick, Mike," Constance said to her husband. "Get the car. We've got to go to Selena."

"What's happened?" asked Mike.

"I don't know," said Constance. "But Selena sounded hysterical and she called me Mrs MacKenzie. She said she had to hurry home to Joey because it's snowing."

But when Constance and Mike Rossi arrived at the Thrifty Corner, the shop was in darkness.

"Oh, darling," cried Constance. "Please hurry."

The car skidded on the new-fallen snow as Mike wrenched the wheel and headed for Selena Cross's house.

They saw her running down the dirt road that led to the Cross house, her feet sliding from under her as she ran, her unbuttoned coat flying behind her.

"Wait!" shouted Mike. "Wait, Selena!"

But she did not hear him. They saw her fall and pick herself up, and she was already through the front door of her house before Mike and Constance could jump out of the car and follow her.

Joey Cross was on his knees on the hearth, building a fire as he did every evening during the winter so that his sister would always find the living-room bright and cheerful when she came in out of the cold. But now his thin body was rigid and his eyes were glazed. Selena flung herself at her brother so that both of them were kneeling on the hearth. They held on to one another as if they were drowning and Joey cried: "S'lenna, S'lenna, S'lenna," over and over.

Her trembling fingers tried to cover his lips and she sobbed, "Oh, Joey. Oh, Joey."

"He'll come back," Joey whispered, his voice faint with fear. "He'll come back, Selena."

"No, Joey. No, Joey. He can't come back ever again."

But her whole body shook and she glanced fearfully over her shoulder. Constance had come forward into the room but Mike had gone back to close the door so that all Selena saw was the dark outline of his body in the shadows and she began to scream. She pushed Joey away from her and in one motion she was on her feet, her fingers tight around the top of the fire tongs.

"Selena!" shouted Mike and came towards her. "Stop it!"

He grabbed her wrist and twisted and the fire tongs fell to the floor and still Selena screamed.

"Let go of me, Lucas. Let go!"

Mike Rossi slapped her hard across the face and his arms were waiting to catch her as she fell forward in a faint.

Joey Cross stood up, still dazed. "Go home," he said to Mike. "I can take care of my sister."

"You sit down and shut up," said Mike and carried Selena to the couch. "Constance, get a blanket. They're coming home with us."

Always, after that, when it began to snow and the wind swept and shrieked behind it late in a winter afternoon, Mike Rossi went to where Selena and Joey Cross were and brought them home with him. But Selena and Joey would not spend the night with Mike and Constance and Allison. When it was late, and the wind had died down, Selena always stood up and said, "Come on, Joey. It's time to go home."

Selena carried the cups of hot chocolate into the living-room.

"I'll beat the pants off you," she said, as she sat down at the chequer board opposite Joey.

"Go ahead and try, big stuff," said her brother.

The wind was a whisper around the corners of the house and the children of Lucas Cross pretended not to hear when a board creaked or a log snapped.

"I saw Ted Carter today," said Selena.

"Him," replied Joey.

"He had his wife with him."

"They make a good pair," said Joey. "Why don't they go back to Boston where they belong?"

"Ted doesn't belong in Boston," said Selena. "He belongs in Peyton Place. At least, that's what he always said."

"Ted Carter always said things he didn't mean," said Joey.

"Never mind," said Selena. "I don't like to hear you talk like that, Joey."

"He's a rat," said Joey. "A two-faced rat."

"Stop it at once."

"How can you stick up for that guy after the way he treated you?" demanded Joey.

"Ted did what he thought was right and that's the end of it," said Selena.

The end of it, thought Selena; life has so many endings. Maybe Ted did what he thought was right, but it stung all the same.

Selena mechanically moved a chequer towards the centre of the board, remembering the last time she had talked to Ted. It had been just after the war had ended and Ted had been at the Harvard Law School less than six months. In Peyton Place to see his parents, he had telephoned Selena and asked to see her.

"Sure, Ted," Selena said. "Come over about eight o'clock."

"Ted Carter wants to talk to me," she told Joey. She had no secrets from Joey. They had shared too much ever to keep anything from each other. "How'd you like to go to the movies or something?"

"Him?" Joey said, too contemptuous even to mention ~~his~~ name. "You're going to let him come to the house ~~after~~ ^{after} the way he acted when you were——"

"When I was waiting to go on trial?" finished ~~Selena~~ ^{Selena}

"Joey, you don't have to be afraid to mention ~~that~~ ^{that}

good to think about something a lot and never talk about it."

"What if he wants you to go back with him?" asked Joey angrily. "What're you going to say?"

Selena turned away and fussed with a bowl of flowers on an end table.

"I don't know," she said. "But I think I'll say yes."

"You're nuts," said Joey disgustedly. "You're worth a dozen Ted Carters."

Selena rubbed her knuckles gently over his head. "You're prejudiced," She smiled.

Joey went off to the movies, as joylessly as to a chore. And Selena waited for Ted, hardly able to breathe at the thought of seeing him again. She knew it was a terrible mistake, but she permitted herself to hope. More than anything in the world, she wanted to be with Ted again. Terrified by life, she had in desperation come to think that only with Ted could she ever be safe.

"It's been a long time, Selena," he said. He stood with his back to the door, nervously turning his hat in his hand.

Selena motioned him to a chair, and thought, How reluctantly he has entered my house. It was obvious to her at a glance that he had come not out of love, or even desire, but only because his New England conscience had nagged him into it.

"I didn't know that you and I had to bother with social niceties," Selena said, a tight smile on her face. "But if that's the way you want it, all right." Then, in a false 'social' voice, like a little girl playing grown-up, she said, "Yes, Ted, it has been a long time. Would you care for a drink?"

"I don't drink," said Ted. "And I shouldn't think you would, either."

His tone was almost sanctimonious and it annoyed Selena.

"Why?" she demanded. "Because my father was a drunkard? Is that what you mean?"

"Selena, for heaven's sake, I didn't mean anything of the kind."

"Then what did you mean?"

"I don't know," said Ted uncomfortably. Selena's tight control made him nervous. He wanted to get on his knees, declare his guilt, beg forgiveness, but, instead, he only said, "This cocktail business has always seemed sort of citified to me."

"I wasn't going to offer you a cocktail, Ted. It's eight o'clock in the evening and I thought you might like a brandy to settle the excellent dinner your mother must have fed you before she let you out."

"No, thank you," said Ted, rather stiffly. He sat in an armchair, his hands on his knees; he leaned towards her yet was remote, isolated by his feelings of guilt and the anguish that seeing Selena caused him.

Selena poured brandy into a large snifter. "Well, Happy Days," she toasted, hoping the irony of it would not be lost on him. "I don't suppose you smoke, either?"

"No."

"Well, I do," she said defiantly, and lit a cigarette. "What did you want to talk to me about?" she asked.

Ted stood up and walked to one of the front windows. He put his hands in his pockets and tipped his head back as if to ease tightened muscles in his neck.

"I'm thinking of getting married," he said. "To a girl I met in Boston."

Selena did not make a sound. She put her glass down silently and put her cigarette into an ashtray.

"I see," she said at last, and her voice had not changed.

Ted turned around slowly and extended his hands as if asking for help.

"I haven't told anyone else yet," he said. "I wanted to tell you first."

"Why did you bother?" Selena asked, and this time the bitterness showed. "Why?"

"Peyton Place is a small town. People are going to talk and I just didn't want you to hear it from someone else."

"That was damned white of you, Ted," she said.

"Selena, for God's sake, don't make it any harder than it is."

"Oh, is it hard, Ted?" she asked. "Why should it be? I knew back before the trial that the great Ted Carter wasn't going to be able to afford a murderess for a wife. So why should it be so hard for you to tell me about your new girl?"

"You know damned well how I feel about you, Selena," said Ted in a tight voice. "That's never going to change. We had a lot together, you and I, but we wouldn't have a thing together in the future."

"Don't you dare come in here and tell me how much you think of me," shouted Selena, jumping to her feet, her fists clenched. "Everyone in town knows how you feel about me, so don't stand there and make pretty speeches. You're a little late."

"Selena, will you sit down for a minute and hear me out? I want to try to explain this to you as best I can."

"There's nothing to explain, Ted," she said wearily. "Why don't you just leave?"

He put his hands on her elbows. "Please," he said. "Sit down."

Selena shrugged and sat down and swirled brandy around in her glass.

"Selena, you know that I've always wanted to be a lawyer," began Ted. "Not just an ordinary lawyer like old Charlie Partridge, but a first-class lawyer."

"There was a time when you didn't think Charlie was so bad," interrupted Selena. "Of course, that was back when you didn't know whether or not you'd ever get to Harvard and Charlie was still in a position to help you."

Ted ignored her barbed remark because there was no answer for it. It was true. He knew better than anyone else how true it was.

"Harvard alone isn't going to make me into a big success," he continued. "Being a successful lawyer takes backing. You've got to have someone big behind you to give you a push."

"I begin to see the light," said Selena, pouring herself more brandy. "This girl in Boston, could her father perhaps be a big-time lawyer?"

Ted looked at the floor. All the reasons that had made so much sense to him as he had walked towards Selena's house now seemed utterly shameful. Face to face with the reality of Selena, the machinations of making a career were both sordid and childish. But he had already committed himself to it; there was no turning back. In his heart he knew that salvation for him lay with Selena, but it could not be. It could not be. He soothed himself with this thought. It could not be! It was Fate at fault, not Ted Carter. It is by such means that weak men salvage their pride.

"Her name is Jennifer Burbank. Her father is John Burbank of Burbank, Burrell and Archibald, one of the biggest law firms in Boston."

Selena threw back her head and began to laugh. "No, stop," she gasped. "Honestly, it's too much! Jennifer Burbank! The biggest law firm in Boston!" She tried to stop laughing but was almost afraid to, for if she did not laugh she knew she would cry.

"Selena, please," begged Ted.

And Selena stopped laughing. She twitched her head and her long, dark hair flew away from her shoulder and rested on her back. Her purple eyes were almost black and the soft, red mouth that Ted had kissed so often was set in a tight, little smile.

Dear God, thought Ted, looking at her, I can see now how she must have looked when she murdered Lucas. I never thought she could look like that.

"Tell me about her, Ted," Selena was saying in a soft voice. "What does she look like? Small, blonde, with a pink and white skin and breasts like lemons?"

"Selena!"

"Oh, but be careful of that kind, Ted," Selena continued, her voice too controlled, too soft. "Some of those rich-bitch Boston families are terribly inbred, you know. She's bound to be a delicate type. Peyton Place would kill her. That thin blue blood can't stand up to our winters."

"We won't be living in Peyton Place," said Ted quietly.

"When I finish at Harvard, her father is going to take me into his firm."

"And tell me, Attorney Carter, do the too-blue Burbanks know about us? You and me, I mean, and about Lucas? Or did they stop reading newspapers when Henry Adams died?"

"They know that you and I were at school together."

"My, my," said Selena, in mock surprise. "Listen to little Ted Carter. 'At school.' Did you ever notice that it's only people with a private school education who talk about having been 'at school'? Have you noticed that, Ted? The rest of us poor slob who went to public schools always say 'in school'. I'm so happy to see you're learning the language of your new family, Ted. I'd hate it if your in-laws had to think of you as a *meat-ball*."

"Selena will you please not talk this way? Can't we talk to each other like old friends? This isn't *you* talking, Selena."

"Maybe it isn't the old Selena, Ted. Maybe you're right, maybe it isn't *me*. But it's *going* to be me, Ted. I don't want to be good old sweet little innocent Selena, everybody's friend. And most of all, Ted, I don't want to be *your* friend." Her voice was no longer soft; it tore from her throat, tortured and coarsened.

"Get your coat and get out of here," she cried.

Ted stood up and watched Selena pour herself another drink. He put on his coat and stood helplessly in front of her.

"Will you kiss me goodbye?" he asked.

"Get out of here!" Selena screamed. "I never want to see you again. You make me sick, do you understand? I'd as soon kiss dirt as kiss you. Now get out!"

When he had gone, she sat for a long time, holding the brandy snifter in both hands. Then she stood up slowly and walked into the kitchen and poured the drink down the sink, as if Ted's presence had tainted it.

She was sitting in an armchair, knitting, when Joey came in.

"What happened?" he asked at once.

"He's going to be married," answered Selena calmly. "To a girl named Jennifer Burbank from Boston, Massachusetts."

Joey looked at his sister and began to unbutton his coat.

"Does it hurt, Selena?" he asked at last.

She rolled up her knitting and put it away in a box.

"Yes," she said, and went into the kitchen to make coffee.

Joey's black king went click-click-click across the chequer board and he removed three of Selena's red men.

"That's eight games for me," he said. "Who was going to beat the pants off who?"

"Whom," corrected Selena.

The clock on the mantelpiece struck twice. "It's two o'clock in the morning," said Selena. "To bed."

Joey stood up and stretched. "I think I'll just get a blanket and curl up here on the sofa," he said casually. "I want to watch the fire."

"All right, Joey," said Selena. She kissed his cheek. "Goodnight."

The wind had died down to almost nothing now, but beyond the black squares of the front windows, Joey could see the endless flakes that would fall all night. He tried the lock on the front door again and put another log on the fire.

Selena lay facing the window, watching for first light, praying for day and an end to night's menace. I wish I were a child, she thought. I wish I still believed that ghosts were real and houses truly haunted; it's my own memories that haunt this house. She cried noiselessly into her pillow. She thought of Ted, but it was not for him she cried. He was merely the symbol of all she had lost. All I have now, she said to herself, all I have now is loneliness. That's the prize I've won from life.

It was daylight and the wind had started up again before Selena and Joey slept.

MAYBE IT will happen today, thought Allison MacKenzie as she awoke.

She jumped up and ran to close her bedroom window against the early morning cold and stood shivering with her hands against the sash, breathless at the beauty she saw outside. For a moment, she pressed her forehead against the cold windowpane, as if to shock herself awake and scatter the night dreams, to make way for those of the day. So much of her days were spent in reverie, dreaming of the 'phone call from her agent, Brad Holmes, that never came: dreaming of her novel, printed, bound, published, and of the fame and success that would follow.

It was still snowing and the wind picked up huge handfuls of it and hurled them everywhere in gigantic plumes. Everything Allison saw was white and clean and soft looking, so that it appeared the whole world was new and pure and it was as if nothing bad or evil could ever have happened there.

Allison went softly, on bare feet, to open her bedroom door and, as soon as she had done so, she felt the little tendrils of warmth from downstairs creep around her ankles. She jumped back into her bed and snuggled down under the blankets to wait for the whole room to warm up.

The whole world is still asleep, she thought, remembering a childhood fancy, and I am the only one awake.

At once, she felt warm and safe and sure of herself, much as she had felt when she had been a little girl and had gone to her secret place in the woods at 'Road's End'. Except that it was better now, for she had learned not to be afraid when it was time to go back to the world of reality. Living in New York, she thought, has at least done that much for me. Her experience with Brad, that brief, intense interlude,

made her feel old and wise. She knew she was neither of those things, but she wanted very much to think so. When you've given so much of yourself, she thought, it's necessary to salvage something from the ruins, no matter how small it is. Even a lie.

It's going to snow all day, she thought. And I shall get up and eat an enormous breakfast and help my mother with the housework after my father has gone off to school. I'm not a famous author, I'm just my mother's daughter.

She never called Michael Rossi 'father'. Sometimes, jokingly, she said 'Daddy-O', and hoped he understood that she meant more than she could yet bring herself to say; but most often she called him Mike. It was just to herself that she said, 'My father'. At first, she had done so as an experiment, to see if she would be overcome with guilt at her disloyalty to Allison MacKenzie, her own father who was dead, but she had felt nothing. It was as if Allison MacKenzie had never really been her father at all, but just a man with whom her mother had had a rather unfortunate love affair a long, long time ago.

"I've never been sorry," her mother had said. "I loved him and he was good to me. And I got you. That's a lot more than most women ever have."

At first, when Allison's bitterness against her mother had been at its peak, she had repeated the ugly word over and over to herself.

Bastard.

And she had thought that she would die of shame and horror. She guarded her secret as well as her mother had ever done. She hugged it tightly to her, carried it with her, waking and sleeping. *Illegitimate, out of wedlock*—words like these leaped off the pages of books she read; they seemed to be printed in a heavier type. More than that, at her most sensitive period she had the feeling they had been used only to wound and hurt and insult her.

She had never told anyone the facts of her birth, not even Stéphanie Wallace, who had been her room-mate in New York, nor Bradley Holmes, who had been her lover.

During the weeks and months of self-pity and self-laceration that had followed when Allison first returned to Peyton Place, she had wondered often and bitterly about Bradley Holmes. She did not even know how to place him, how to identify him in the scheme of her life. Could he be called her lover, she wondered. But that implied love, and on his side there had been none. No, he was simply her first man, the one who had introduced her to sex, who had taken something from her. And given her something, too. For this reason he was important to her. A man she would never forget. For all the sophistication of her writing, Allison could not yet rid herself of the belief that you had to marry the man with whom you had made love.

She had wasted a lot of time hating Brad, but in the end it was due to him that she had begun to understand her mother and to love her again. Knowing herself now to be human and capable of weakness, she no longer expected others to be supermen, not even her mother.

Allison heard a stirring downstairs, and in a few minutes her mother's laugh drifted up the stairwell to Allison's room. Her mother and Mike never got up separately, just as they never did anything apart one from the other. If she had ever needed anything to convince her that what she and Brad had was not love, she had only to look at Mike and Constance. Allison had heard them giggling together like school children more than once as they made coffee.

"It's indecent," Allison had laughed, for her mother always bathed while Mike was shaving.

"I can't help it," Mike said. "Your mother always has aroused the most shocking feeling in me. And, I suspect, she always will."

"Shocking my arse," said Constance inelegantly. "The day that you're shocked by anything will be occasion for the declaration of a national holiday. School children will celebrate it with fireworks, parades and essays."

When Allison went downstairs it was to the smell of coffee and bacon, and the first thing she saw was her mother, in a pale blue robe, her golden head outlined against a snow-

covered windowpane Allison's eyes stung with tears as they always did when she saw something beautiful.

"Good morning, darling," said Constance, and kissed Allison's cheek. "Isn't this a morning!"

"This morning I am masquerading as a short-order cook," said Mike as Allison put her cheek up. "One egg or two?"

"Two!" cried Allison, suddenly overwhelmed with love and a wonderful certainty that today was going to be a marvellous day.

"It's going to happen today!" she cried, and almost danced over to the stove to pour herself a cup of coffee.

"Oh, darling, I hope so," said Constance. "Did you dream that it would?"

"No, but I know it just the same," said Allison, and sat down at the kitchen table. "Today Bradley Holmes is going to call me from New York. 'Hello, Allison' he will say. And I'll say, 'Hello, Brad.' And then he'll say, 'I have wonderful news for you. I've sold your book.' Then if I don't faint I'll start to cry, and he'll tell me to whom he's sold it and you, Mother, will have to call Mike because I'll never be able to do it, and when Mike comes home he'll break down and get two bottles of that champagne he's been saving and we'll all celebrate."

Mike assumed a pose with his coffee cup raised and said, "And I'll stand like this and say, 'Here's to Allison MacKenzie and her best seller *Samuel's Castle*.' And then, ladies, we shall all proceed to tie one on."

"And then," said Constance, "I'll have to get busy and call up everyone we know and say, 'Please come over to our house because we are having a party for the celebrated authoress Allison MacKenzie' and then Mike will have to start serving beer, because we don't have that much champagne in the cellar."

"Damn it," cried Mike, "now the eggs are burning!" And all three of them laughed.

Allison sighed. "Brought back to earth by burning eggs. How prosaic." But she preferred the dream, and said, "Wouldn't it be wonderful if Brad *did* sell it?"

"Yes it would, darling," said Constance. "It would make us all so happy, and you especially. You deserve it, darling. Not just because you have a wonderful talent, but because you've worked so hard."

"It'll happen," said Mike. "One day soon, mark my words. Now come on, let's eat. I'll be late for school."

Worked so hard, Allison thought. It was an accurate description, yet it did not begin to express all that she had put into her novel. The years of writing and the drudgery of rewriting. What made it so hard was not, after all, the book itself, but *doubt*. Doubt haunted her, plucked at her nerves, kept her from sleep and rest. Would it be any good? Would it find a publisher? She could never trust her own judgment. The chapter that read so well at midnight would appear in the light of day as fit only for the wastebasket. It was a book she had cried over—as much, she sometimes thought, as any mother ever cried over an ungrateful child.

Samuel's Castle was the culmination of over two years of work for Allison. When she had first returned home at the time of Selena Cross's trial, she had come in defeat as a writer; for, although she had managed to support herself with what she earned as a short story writer for the magazines, her novel had been a failure. Bradley Holmes had told her flatly that he could not sell her book, and that, even if he could, he would not do so. The publication of an inferior work would do her more harm than good in the long run, he had told her.

"Try the novel again," Brad had told her. "Wait until you're older, more experienced."

Well, Allison had thought ruefully when she got home, she was certainly more experienced if not much older.

David Noyes, whom she had met in New York, was the only person to whom she had ever told the whole story of her brief affair with Bradley Holmes, and it was David who came to Peyton Place to help and comfort her.

"I won't say it didn't hurt like hell, Allison," David had said to her. "No man likes to hear from the woman he loves about her sex experiences with another man. Women think

we do, but we don't. The single standard is something that women have accepted much more readily than men. I think they invented it." He laughed, was silent for a moment, then said, "It's ended, Allison—you and Brad, that's all over and done with. And now is going to be the roughest time of all for you because you have to pick up the pieces of your life and try to assemble them into a pattern."

"Oh, David. How? It's always easy to give advice like that, high-sounding and vague. I want you to help me. Be specific. I don't want advice. I guess what I want is a prescription."

"Get to work," David had told her. "It may sound trite but it's true. Work your damned head off. Work. To work at one's chosen task is one of the truly great satisfactions that life offers. It's a better healer than time."

In the end, Allison had said that she would try.

"And about us, Allison?" he asked then, his eyes sad and imploring.

"Nothing about us, David. Not now. Not yet. Maybe not ever. Perhaps when you think about it, you won't be so sure that you want secondhand goods." She turned her head away from him; her lips tight, trying to hold back the tears. She did not know whether it was the memory of Brad or David's question that had caused something in her breast to break.

"Shut up," said David harshly. "I've never been a hold-out for virginity."

"I'll write to you, David. Maybe when I've gone back to work it'll be different. Maybe it's true. Perhaps time and work will accomplish what I haven't been able to."

So David Noyes had gone back to New York, and Allison had unpacked her manuscript and gone to work.

Samuel's Castle was the story of Samuel Peyton, a rich Negro, who had married a white girl and had escaped from the ostracism of the world by building himself a castle on the hills outside Peyton Place. This was the background, the counterpoint to the story of a town very much like Peyton Place and of the people who lived there. When Allison

had finally finished writing the sixth draft and had sent it off to Brad, he called her the day after he had received it. It was not usual for an agent to give all his attention, and so quickly, to the work of a new, young, virtually unknown writer, Allison knew.

"Allison, it's great!" Brad had said joyfully "I'll sell it! I'm certain of that."

"At last," said Allison laconically, too tired and sick of the manuscript now to care what happened to it. She had done her best for it; now it was in the hands of others. It did not seem to belong to her any more.

"Listen, is Peyton Place at all like the town in the book?"

"Yes. Why?"

"Oh, nothing. Except that it must be a hell of a snake pit."

"Peyton Place is no different from any other small town, Brad, and neither is the town in the book. They're all alike."

"Keep your fingers crossed, baby," said Brad. "You'll be hearing from me!"

And every day since, Allison had awakened with the same first thought: *Maybe it will happen today.*

"I've got to get at that living-room today," said Constance when she and Allison had finished the breakfast dishes. "It looks like a pig pen."

The living-room did not look like a pig pen but Constance was a meticulous housekeeper and the least little sign of dust was enough to send her scurrying for the vacuum cleaner.

"You just went over that room with a fine-toothed comb the day before yesterday," said Allison.

"Nevertheless," said Constance, "I can't go around giving champagne parties for authoresses in dirty rooms."

"I'm going to shovel the front walk," said Allison, "and get the cobwebs off my brain. It must be cobwebs that make me have such impossible ideas the first thing in the morning."

She bent to the task. Holding the shovel with its familiar, worn handle in her mittened hands, she hoped that work as

to put everything behind this book. I have the feeling Allison will soon be able to afford the best hotels and she ought to start getting used to them."

"Yes, Mr Holmes. Goodbye, Mr Holmes," said Constance.

CHESTNUT STREET was a wide, tree-shaded avenue which ran parallel to Elm Street, one block south of the main thoroughfare. Chestnut Street had always been, and still was, considered to be the 'best' street in Peyton Place. Every town has its Chestnut Street. On the hottest summer day, the Chestnut Streets are cooler than all the others. The houses that line these streets always indicate, unmistakably, that they were built at a time when servants were cheap and plentiful, and that the owners could afford them. To the people who live on the other streets, these houses are always mysterious. One thinks of secret rooms and hidden staircases.

There had never been any danger that anyone undesirable would find his way to Chestnut Street, for each great house was surrounded on all sides by the land of the individual owner. The land was 'Old Land', acres of ground that had belonged to the families who had come to live in the shadow of Samuel Peyton's castle when the castle was new.

The men who lived on Chestnut Street were the life's blood of Peyton Place. They were the men with money and position and, therefore, the men who were in control.

"Takes more than money to run a town," said Dr Matthew Swain to his friend Seth Buswell. "Folks'll take just so much of cottoning down to money and then they say to hell with it."

"Then the ungrateful bastards unionize," said Leslie Harrington before Seth could answer. "I can't open."

The men of Chestnut Street were gathered at the home of Matthew Swain for one of their Friday night poker games. These games had become legend in Peyton Place.

"Age cannot wither him, nor custom stay his lousy, two-edged tongue," said Seth, looking at Harrington.

"I can open," said Charles Partridge. "And I will."

Charles Partridge still jumped into a conversation, as he had always done, when words between people threatened to become unfriendly; but he needn't have bothered to play the rôle of pacifist between Leslie and Seth, for those two hurled insults at each other only from habit now. The animosity that had motivated them in earlier years had been forgotten at last.

After the death of Rodney Harrington, Leslie's only son, his friends on Chestnut Street had been worried about the wealthy millowner. Overnight, Leslie Harrington had changed from the hard, pushing businessman he had always been to a blurred imitation of himself. Even those who had always hated Leslie began to feel sorry for him.

"He got his comeuppance at last," said a great many people in Peyton Place. Some said it with complacent pride, as if Leslie Harrington's comeuppance had been the result of their efforts.

"Yep. But it don't seem's though he should have got it so hard, all at once like that," said others.

If Leslie Harrington could have heard the voices, he would have felt that fate was words, that his life was nothing at as it was described by others. Gossip brought back Peyton Place the dead and the missing. Rodney's and Betty's names were spoken more often now than when they had lived in Peyton Place. The rusty voices of old men and women were like a litany.

"Mebbe. But I'll wager there's some that ain't as sorry as others that Leslie Harrington got his at last."

"Oh, yeah? Like who?"

"Like John and Berit Anderson over on Ash Street."

"Yep. Run that girl of theirs right out of town, Leslie did. Can't blame the Andersons if they ain't sorry for Leslie now."

"Wonder what happened to Betty Anderson. John never says a word about her. Like she was dead."

"Well, I guess when she went and got herself knocked up by Rodney Harrington it was the same to John as if she was dead."

"Yep. Them Swedes got their pride just like anybody else."

"Mebbe she's livin' over to Rutland. Didn't she have an aunt over there?"

"Nah. Jared Clarke's been over to Rutland a million times and you can trust Jared to know if Betty was living there and to tell everyone here about it."

There had been plenty of speculation in Peyton Place about what had happened to Betty Anderson, just as there always was about a girl who had left town the way Betty had. But what no one in town knew, not even the men on Chestnut Street, who usually knew everything that happened in Peyton Place, was that Leslie Harrington had made a quiet search of his own for the girl he had tried to destroy. He had not gone to Buck McCracken because Peyton Place's sheriff was a notoriously slow mover and, besides, he had a big mouth. If he contacted a nearby branch of the Missing Persons Bureau they would send people to town to ask questions, and this, above all, Leslie did not want. There were no private detectives in Peyton Place, nor in the whole state, for that matter, and they would have been impossible anyway. They, too, asked questions.

And so it appeared that Leslie Harrington had failed, but failure was a luxury that Leslie had never permitted himself and he did not intend to start now. He'd find a way, he was sure. It might take time, but he'd find a way.

"I raised Leslie," said Matthew Swain. "Are you playing cards or day-dreaming about chorus girls?"

"I'll see you, Matt," said Leslie, and shoved coins into the middle of the table. "Straight as a string with a black queen high, Matt. Beat me."

"Can't," said Matthew Swain disgustedly. "You always did have the goddamndest luck, Leslie."

Not always, thought Leslie. Not quite always.

"Saw Ted Carter today," said Charles Partridge. "Had his wife with him. Nice-looking girl."

"Humph," said the doctor.

"Now hold on, Matt," said Leslie. "You can't hold it

against Carter forever just because he didn't stick by Selena Cross. After all."

"After all my ass," said Dr Swain. "None of my business anyhow. Come on, deal."

"A young feller like that, trying to make something of himself and get ahead in the world. You can't blame him," continued Leslie as if Matt had not spoken. "It'd be all right if he was going to stay right here in Peyton Place, but it wouldn't do for him to have a wife like that anywhere else. People got long memories, most of 'em."

"Yes, they do," said Seth Buswell. "And not only about murder. There's other things folks remember."

"What the hell are you trying to say, Seth," demanded Leslie. "Come on, spit it out. Better to say it than sit there thinking it all evening."

Seth threw his cards down on the table. "About Betty Anderson and her kid, for one thing," he said angrily.

Leslie looked as if Seth had slapped him across the mouth.

"Now, now," said Charles Partridge. "All that's over and done with. Water over the dam. Doesn't do any good at all to keep bringing it up. Let's play cards."

"Who brought anything up?" demanded Seth. "Did I start anything? It just seems to me that before Leslie starts in talking about anybody else in town, he ought to look after his own fences."

Leslie put his cards down very quietly and looked at Seth straight in the eye.

"I've been trying to find that girl for two years," he said.

His three friends stared at him in disbelief, but there was no mistaking the truth etched in the suddenly obvious lines in Leslie's face.

"Why?" asked Matthew Swain gently.

"Goddamn it," cried Leslie, "because of my grandson. That's why. He's the last of the Harringtons, and I don't know where he is."

"Why didn't you let us help you, Leslie?" asked Charles. "We didn't know."

"Well, I'd never lift a goddamned finger to help you

Leslie," said Seth angrily. "What're you trying to pull anyway? You want to find the girl so that you can get her baby away from her, is that it?"

"Seth," said Matt Swain. "Be quiet a minute."

"I never said I wanted to take the boy away from his mother," said Leslie defensively. "If I found them, naturally I'd take them both in. If she wanted to come, I mean."

"Yea, and you'd make damn sure she didn't want to, wouldn't you?" said Seth bitterly. "Christ, but you are a son-of-a-bitch, Harrington. You always were, but I was dumb enough to think you'd changed with age."

"Seth!" shouted Dr Swain. "Shut up!" He turned back to Leslie Harrington.

"Would you, Leslie?" he asked. "Take them both in, I mean?"

Leslie looked at his hands. "Yes," he said at last. "I would. I want to. But I've done everything I know how, and I still can't find her."

"What have you tried, Leslie?" asked Charles.

"Christ, I even went to that goddamned family of hers. If they knew anything, they weren't telling, and as for the girl, she never did have an aunt over to Rutland."

"Anything else?" asked Seth, still not convinced of Leslie's motives.

"Well, what the hell else could I do?" demanded Leslie. "Listen, Seth. I know how it sounds. But, Jesus, I couldn't go to Buck McCracken. And as for that missing persons outfit, they'd have had cops all over town asking questions. I even thought of hiring a private detective, but they'd have been the same way. I tell you, I was afraid."

It was a word that Seth had never thought he'd hear from Leslie Harrington. Afraid. And he began to understand, a little, the emptiness that filled Leslie's life.

"We could help you," said Seth finally.

"How? What can we do?" asked Leslie.

"We can put advertisements in the personal columns of the newspapers," said Seth.

"Ah-h," said Leslie disgustedly. "That was ~~one of~~

first things I tried. I had ads in every paper in towns from the Canadian border clear down to Boston."

Seth leaned back in his chair. "Leslie," he said, "go into any house on Ash Street, or into the home of any of your mill hands for that matter, and look at the newspapers they read. They don't buy the *Boston Herald* or the *Concord Monitor*. They buy tabloids. Either the *Boston Record* or the *New York Daily News* or other newspapers like them. Those are the papers with all the stories about knife killings in Harlem and rapes in the Back Bay, the gossip columns about people in New York and Hollywood. I'll bet anything that wherever Betty Anderson is, if she buys a newspaper at all, she buys one of those."

"What if she doesn't read the personal columns," said Dr Swain. "I imagine that there are lots of folks who don't."

"Maybe not," said Seth, "but she reads Winchell, I'm sure of it. Leslie, you could buy an inch of space on the same page as Winchell's column in every newspaper in the country that publishes him."

"That'll cost you something, Leslie," said Charles Partridge, who, some said, took better care of other people's money than he did of his own.

"Can you fix it up, Seth?" asked Leslie.

"Yes," said Seth. "Not from here. I've got to go down to Manchester, day after tomorrow. I'll do it from there."

"Now, we'll see," said Leslie, and smiled at his friends: "Now we'll see."

When Leslie and Charles had left, Matthew Swain helped himself to another drink and then extended the bottle to Seth.

"What do you think about Leslie, Seth?" he asked. "Do you think he means what he says?"

Seth gazed at his friend. "Well, for Christ's sake, Matt, it was you telling me to shut up in the beginning when I didn't believe him. Now that he's got me convinced, you turn around and ask if I think he means what he says."

Dr Swain smiled. "I guess what I really was wondering was whether I believe him."

"What is it, Matt?"

Matt made a gesture of self-annoyance with his hand. "Oh, hell," he said. "I guess I've known Leslie Harrington for too many years and I'm cursed with one of those long memories I'm always yapping at other people about. Don't pay any attention to me, Seth."

"No, you don't," cried Seth. "Don't pull that on me, you old bastard. Now what the hell are you driving at?"

Matt Swain looked down into his drink. "I keep remembering," he said. "I keep remembering how Leslie never could stand to be beaten at anything. Not even when he was a kid."

"But he did get beaten," objected Seth. "The worst beating a man could take, just about. He lost his son, Matt. His only son. It changed him, you know that. He's never been the same."

"Like I said, Seth. Don't pay any attention to me. It's been a big day and I'm tired to the point of imagining *things*."

But when Matthew Swain went to bed, he was wondering. Does the leopard change his spots or does he merely camouflage himself by hiding behind something? Behind something that would fool even the most observant eye. Matt groaned aloud. Like Leslie, he was alone. Whether he groaned or roared with laughter, no one would be disturbed. Matt was haunted by nothing but loneliness, and he had decided he was too old to take the cure.

ROBERTA CARTER sat up in her bed so silently that the top sheet barely rustled against her nightgown. She looked across the narrow aisle that separated her bed from Harmon's and saw that he was well covered and sleeping soundly. In the dark, she stood up and fixed her pillows under her blankets so that if Harmon awoke and looked across to her bed it would appear that she was there, asleep. She left her slippers on the rug, just as they had been when she had taken them off, and she was very careful not to disturb the folds of her robe at the foot of the bed. Then she tiptoed across the room and out of the door. The rest of her plans had been carefully made earlier in the evening and she had smiled to herself as she carried them out right under the very noses of the people concerned.

It had been a very good dinner that evening, she congratulated herself. Heavy enough to make Harmon feel full and rather sluggish afterwards, but not heavy enough to make Ted and Jennifer feel anything but contented and well fed. Then there had been the sedative in Harmon's coffee, not enough to hurt him, of course, but just enough to make him say that he couldn't keep his eyes open a minute longer by nine o'clock.

"Well, now, dear," Roberta had told him. "You just sit still one more minute and I'll go up and turn down the beds."

"Oh, please let me help you, Mother," said Jennifer, jumping up.

Roberta put a restraining hand on her shoulder. "Now, you just sit down and finish your coffee, dear," she said. "I won't be a minute."

"But I'd like to help you," protested Jennifer.

Roberta was hard put to keep annoyance from showing

on her face and in her voice. That was just one more thing about Jennifer, she thought. Always arguing over the simplest things. Ted had never been like that. The only time her boy had ever been pig-headed about anything was when he was younger and had a crush on Selena Cross. But he'd got over that and he'd never dug his heels in about anything since. Now it appeared that Jennifer, who had seemed so sweet and tractable when Ted had been courting her, had a little stubborn streak that could prove to be very annoying if it weren't curbed. But right now was not the time to be annoyed.

"All right, then," Roberta smiled. "Why don't you and Ted go into the kitchen and make a pot of coffee? I'd love a fresh cup when I come down."

Roberta went upstairs, humming to herself, and turned down the beds in her room. Then she went down the long hall to the room that had always been Ted's and which he now shared with Jennifer whenever the two of them came to Peyton Place for the weekend. That had been another of Jennifer's ideas. Roberta had wanted 'the children', as she called Ted and Jennifer, to use the large guest room next to her room, but Jennifer had turned stubborn again.

"But, dear," Roberta had said, "that old room of Ted's is way down at the other end of the hall, and the bathroom is at this end. It just won't do, dear. You'll be much more comfortable right here next to me."

"That's sweet of you, Mother," said Jennifer. "But really, we'd rather use Ted's old room. Wouldn't we, Ted?"

"Doesn't matter to me," said Ted.

He did not see the sudden glare that his wife gave him, but Roberta did.

"Well, it matters to me," said Jennifer with a pretty pout. "I like your old room. It has so much of you in it, and I like to think of you as a little boy, sleeping there."

Ted put an arm around her. "Anything you say, darling," he smiled.

Roberta had made up the bed in Ted's old room, but right then she had begun to wonder just what it was that

Jennifer had to hide that she had to be stuck off in a corner somewhere in a house with her own in-laws.

She's talking about me! The thought had come to Roberta in a flash, like a divine sign from Heaven. She's talking about me. Trying to turn my boy against me!

Well, as Roberta put it to herself, she'd never been one to let herself be undermined without fighting back. But she couldn't begin to fight until she knew what she was up against. And it did not take her long to find a way.

Roberta smiled to herself as she turned back the blankets on the big double bed in Ted's old room. She spread an extra quilt across the foot of the bed, and then she went very quietly to the room next door. It was a small room, containing a bed, dresser and one chair and had originally been used as a maid's room when old Dr Quimby, Roberta's first husband, had been alive. In later years, Roberta had used it as a place to store extra blankets and dishes and other odds and ends which a family accumulates over the years.

Harmon Carter and Ted would have been surprised indeed to see the narrow bed freshly made up and to find the hot-air grate open. It was a good-sized grate, fully twelve inches square, and Roberta had examined it carefully from both rooms. When it was dark in the storage room, no one could possibly tell, without getting down on all fours under Ted's bed, that the lever had been moved and that the squares in the grate were now open. Roberta had occupied the bed in the storage room every time Jennifer and Ted came to Peyton Place to visit. In six months she had heard many things. She knew that Ted had had nothing to say about the apartment that he and Jennifer rented in Cambridge. It was a lovely apartment, large and sunny. Roberta had seen it herself, but Ted was not comfortable there because Jennifer's father paid the rent.

"Damn it, it makes me feel kept," said Ted.

"What would you have us do?" demanded Jennifer. "Would you move me into some furnished room and support me on what you could earn as a part-time soda jerk or gas station attendant?"

"Lots of guys work their way through," said Ted. "A little work never killed anybody. I've always worked."

"What if you fell down on your grades?" asked Jennifer. "Daddy's firm doesn't take in people who got bad grades at law school. Not that they object to a nice gentlemanly 'C' once in a while, but they don't like men who make a habit of getting marks like that. Oh darling," she said, her voice dreamy and gentle now, "some day it's going to be Burbank, Burrell, Archibald and Carter. Won't that be wonderful? Won't it make a little pride swallowing now worth while?"

"Burbank, Burrell, Archibald and Carter," said Ted. "Yes, darling. It'll make everything worth while."

Roberta was pleased when she heard that from her side of the grate. Her Ted had never been a small thinker and he wasn't going to become one now. And it wasn't as if the Burbanks did everything for the children. She and Harmon sent them a nice cheque every week. There had been a few bad moments, too, during Roberta's eavesdropping. Once, Jennifer had questioned Ted about Selena Cross.

"Were you in love with her?" asked Jennifer.

Roberta held her breath as Ted hesitated. "No," he said at last, and Roberta let out a silent sigh. "We went around together a few times, but that's all.

"Is she pretty?"

"She's all right."

"Is she prettier than I?"

"Sweetheart, no one in the world is prettier than you."

Roberta had listened shamelessly as her son made love to his wife and once she had almost felt sorry for him. Jennifer seemed to be awfully wishy-washy about sex, and sometimes she had sounded frightened and it had taken Ted hours to calm her and then arouse her gently so that she let him take her. It hadn't been that way with Harmon and her, Roberta remembered, smiling in the dark. But then, too much sex wasn't good for a man who had to keep his mind on his books. Luckily, Harmon had never been a

student. In six months, Roberta had heard the children making love only three times, and after each time, Ted had been pale and shaky the next day. Yes, thought Roberta, it was a good thing that Jennifer was a little frigid.

Never once, in all the time that Roberta Carter had spied on her son and his wife, did she feel shame or remorse. Ted was her son, her only son, and she had a right to see that everything went well for him. If he were disturbed about anything, she wanted to know. And if his wife should try to turn him away from his mother, she had a right to know that, too. It did not matter to Roberta that in six months' time she had never heard Jennifer make a single derogatory remark about her. The girl might, in the future. Just because she hadn't until now was no reason to suppose that she never would.

"My!" exclaimed Roberta, coming into the living-room and giving an exaggerated shiver. "It's going to be another cold night. Still snowing, too. Our windows won't be open much tonight, I can tell you that."

"Ours will," said Jennifer and laughed. "I'm married to the biggest fresh-air enthusiast in captivity."

Harmon yawned. "Warm or cold," he said, "bed's going to feel good to me."

Roberta put up her cheek to be kissed. "I'll be up shortly, dear," she said.

When she did go upstairs it was ten o'clock and Ted and Jennifer were playing backgammon in front of the fire, and at ten-thirty, when she crept down the hall towards the storage room, she could hear their voices coming faintly up the stairway. Roberta Carter locked the storage room door behind her and got silently under the warm blankets in the narrow bed. It was a quarter to twelve when she heard Ted snap off the lights in the room next door.

Jennifer Burbank Carter was twenty-two years old and never once, in the six months of her marriage, had she undressed in front of her husband.

"It's not nice," she had told him with finality.

Jennifer had always lived in an environment where every-

thing was Nice. There had been Burbanks in Boston for almost as long as there had been Cabots and Lowells, and the standards of behaviour in Jennifer's family had not changed in over two hundred years. A lady did not make an exhibition of herself, ever.

Once, when Jennifer was twelve, she had gone shopping with her mother and in one of the stores they had seen a girl with bright, blonde hair and a swollen-looking, red mouth. The girl was chewing gum and looking at costume jewellery and she had a pair of enormous, hard-looking breasts under a very tight sweater. Jennifer had stopped and stared at the girl until her mother noticed. Mrs Burbank's face got very red and she almost shook Jennifer when she took her arm.

"I've never seen such a display of vulgarity in my life!" said Mrs Burbank. "Remember, Jennifer. Women who have to use their bodies to create an impression are vulgarians of the cheapest, crudest sort."

"But, Mother——"

"Don't argue, Jennifer. You know I'm right. As you grow older, you'll realize it even more."

For a long time after that, Jennifer thought of her body only as something to be kept clean, covered and hidden. As she grew older she was measured by her mother's dressmaker and in due time she found a dozen satin and lace brassières in a box on the foot of her bed. Later, there had been wispy pantie-girdles to be worn on dress-up occasions but there had never been any discussion of any sort on the subject of underwear between Jennifer and her mother.

When Jennifer was sixteen years old and in her last year at a very fine girls' school just outside Boston, she roomed with a girl named Anne Harvey. Anne was a year older than Jennifer, and her father was head of the largest insurance age house in the state of Massachusetts. Anne was a big, muscular girl but so full of good humour that she got on with at school never teased her about her looks. They admired her and made her captain of the school football team and president of the student council, and every one of them wanted to be 'Anne's best friend'. Jennifer was the only one who

The two of them were inseparable. They went everywhere together and were thought of as a team, but Jennifer never could manage to feel secure in her relationship with Anne. There was too much competition, she thought, and was very, very careful never to offend Anne because Anne had a hundred little ways of letting her know that the school was full of girls who'd give their eye teeth to be in Jennifer's place.

One spring afternoon, Jennifer was alone in the room she shared with Anne. She was changing her clothes, getting ready for a trip into town, when Anne came in quietly. Jennifer whirled around quickly and grabbed for her robe.

"I didn't expect you," she said, almost stammering with embarrassment.

"Don't let me bother you," said Anne. "I just came up for a book."

"If I'd known you were coming, I'd have used the bathroom but I——"

"For heaven's sake, Jennifer," said Anne in good-natured exasperation, "it's not the end of the world. We're both girls, you know."

Jennifer turned away in confusion and as she did so she tripped over the edge of her robe, almost falling, and dropping the robe altogether.

"Be careful!" cried Anne, running to her. Anne's hands were on Jennifer's waist. "Did you hurt yourself?"

Jennifer could not move. "No," she said. "I'm all right."

Anne did not take her hands away. "You scared me," she said softly.

Still Jennifer did not move, but kept her back turned as Anne's hands caressed her soft skin.

"Such beautiful, lovely skin," whispered Anne into Jennifer's ear. Suddenly her hands tightened hard enough to make Jennifer gasp.

"Stop it," said Jennifer. "You mustn't."

"You're so beautiful," said Anne, and began to sob. "So little and perfectly made and beautiful."

And then Jennifer turned around. She moved away

slowly from Anne's hands and went to lie down on her bed.

"Am I, Anne?" she said softly and her eyes glittered. "Am I?"

Anne went on her knees next to the bed, her face wet with tears.

"Oh, yes, my darling," she said. "Yes, you are."

She kissed Jennifer on the mouth, a long, deep kiss, and when she raised her head, Jennifer was looking straight into her eyes.

"For heaven's sake, Anne," she said coldly, "don't be so sloppy."

Anne rocked away from her as if she had been struck and Jennifer stood up slowly. She dressed carefully.

"I'll be gone for a while," she said when she was clothed. "Wait right here. Don't go down to dinner without me."

Anne waited. Not only that day, but every day after that whenever Jennifer felt like telling her to wait. She waited for the rare occasions when Jennifer allowed herself to be kissed, and she let her wretchedness show whenever Jennifer sat naked in front of the dressing table and said, "Brush my hair, will you, Anne?" She lavished gifts on Jennifer and dropped all her other friends, and whenever Jennifer snapped her fingers, there was Anne, waiting to do as she was told. Once in a great while, Anne rebelled.

"I don't need you!" she shouted. "There are plenty of others who'd love to be in your place."

"Really?" asked Jennifer, raising her eyebrows. "Others? Right here at school?"

"Right here at school," said Anne.

"Hm-m. I wonder if Miss Fenwick knows about that. Do you imagine so, Anne?"

"Don't threaten me," said Anne angrily. "You wouldn't dare go to her with anything like that."

"Maybe," said Jennifer. "Maybe I would and maybe I wouldn't. I'm not like you and you know it. Go ahead and get yourself someone else. Boston is full of young men who, I'm sure, will find me just as attractive as you ever did."

Anne snorted. "I know your kind," she said. "You'd never have anything to do with a man now. You put too high a value on your virginity to give it away for less than a wedding band."

"Darling, don't be naïve," said Jennifer with a little laugh. "I've been doing a lot of reading since I found out about you. All kinds of reading. A man is the easiest creature in the world to fool. I'm not worried about my virginity or the lack of it."

"What do you mean, 'lack of it'?" demanded Anne furiously. "Have you already been with a man?" She grabbed Jennifer's shoulder and shook her. "Have you?"

"Take your hands off me, Anne," said Jennifer coldly. "You have no need to be concerned about my affairs. You said yourself that you could find plenty of others to take my place. Well, go ahead."

"Oh, God," cried Anne, "I didn't mean it, darling. Please forgive me. I didn't mean it. Tell me it isn't true about your being with men."

Jennifer pushed Anne's arms away.

"Not yet, it isn't true. Not yet. But don't annoy me, Anne, or I might just have to go out to discover if I've been missing anything."

Anne Harvey and Jennifer Burbank were 'best friends' all the rest of the school year and during the next summer. Jennifer dated frequently, but she had answers for every one of Anne's miserable questions.

"I have to," she told Anne. "What would my parents think if I never went out with men?"

"I can't stand it!"

"Oh, don't be so sloppy," said Jennifer impatiently. "You bore me when you go all weepy like this. I go out with men because I have to. I'm afraid you'll just have to take my word for it, Anne."

When Jennifer denied intimate knowledge of men, Anne found it easy to believe. Not only because she wanted to, but because Jennifer's very appearance lent truth to her words. Anyone would have believed her. There was noth-

March, when my birthday comes, the spring was invading the garden of Crookmill. Very little had been planted in the garden – nothing, indeed, but a dozen bushes of climbing roses along the wall of the house in the autumn, just after we had cleared the worst of the jungle that had prevailed, but it was a wonderfully exciting garden none the less, because so many unexpected things happened in it. A length of dead-looking fibre that trailed about like a frayed old rope on one wall suddenly burst out all over with yellow stars and declared itself to be a jasmine of some sort, and all over the black earth and rough grass, where odd lots of rubble, old nails, scraps of corrugated iron and pieces of rotten wood still lay about, little green sword-points poked up and were identified, with wonder, as snowdrops, crocuses and daffodils.

On the morning of my birthday Twice came in carrying in his cupped hand two infinitesimally small violets and a heart-shaped leaf. "Flowers for your birthday, my lady. And from your own garden. Excuse me for a little. I'll be back for breakfast."

He backed the car out and went off down the road, but was back in about ten minutes and came into the kitchen where I was frying bacon.

"Hi, Missis," he said, "here's us!"

In his arms he held a small pup – it would be more correct to say a 'young' pup, for he was not exactly small. He was about fifteen inches long, with gangling legs and enormous feet, and had a buff-gold coat, with a black muzzle, black rims round his eyes, black edges on his ears and a golden tail that shaded to a black tip.

"What a *craïtur*!" I said. "Put him down! What is he?"

I squatted on the floor. The pup came cavorting towards me, lost control of his gangling legs on the polished floor and slid into my arms on his bottom.

"What is he, she says! What a thing to say to a well-bred fellow! And him only six weeks old. He's a mastiff!"

"Oh, Twice! He's beautiful!"

And he was. His coat was the colour of whisky and as smooth and satiny as a very good blend at that.

"And his name is Drambuie of Kilcarron."

"Gurr!" concurred Drambuie and leapt at Twice's shoes.

"He'll make an awful mess, Flash, and probably take the house apart," said Twice apologetically.

"He will *not*!"

"You are pleased, Flash?"

"Oh, Twice! I'm so pleased I'm tongue-tied!" I seized the pup and kissed his silky head. "Sorry! Wrong person!" So then I kissed Twice, of which Drambuie did not approve for he snatched the dish-towel from the rail and made off down the passage with it, shaking it violently as he went.

"Come back here, you brute!" bawled Twice.

"Don't *bawl* at him like that!"

"Expect me to stand here shouting Drambuie of Kilcaron? We'll have to get a calling name for him. What about Sandy? After all, he's sand-coloured and he's an Alexander now."

"God, the bacon!" I snatched the pan from the fire and stood looking at Twice over the smoking fat. "No. Not Sandy."

"Why not?"

"It's a name I'm saving up."

"Saving up?"

"We - we can't have two people called Twice in the house."

"Flash, what do you mean? Do you mean to tell— Oh, damn and blast it!" He shook the hand that had got into the hot bacon fat and began to suck it. "Do you mean to—"

"Oh, Twice, I'm sorry - about your hand, I mean. Yes. Yes. It's nearly three months—"

"Put down that cursed pan! Honestly, the times you pick to tell a fellow—"

"Let me see that hand—" I put the pan back on the stove.

"My hand's all right. Flash, you are the most wonderful—"

There was a hideous crash from the living-room. "God Almighty! What's that?"

Drambuie came scuttling, terrified, into the kitchen and leapt straight up into my arms. Fearfully, we went and looked into the living-room. Drambuie had discovered the corner of the breakfast cloth and the floor was a litter of broken plates, cups, saucers, spilt sugar, milk and marmalade.

"Oh, Dram! You wicked dog!" I said and gave him a

resounding slap on his fat bottom. He yelped, sprang from my arms and disappeared under the sofa, all except the black tip of his tail.

"Well, Dram Alexander, you certainly bought it, name and all!" said Twice. "Gosh, I'm having a wonderful your-birthday!"

The bacon was well and truly burned by now, but by the time we sat down to eggs without bacon the baby was part of the family.

"Mind you," said Twice, "if she's a girl I won't have her called Sandra or anything silly like that."

"Certainly not," I agreed. "I thought Elizabeth, if you liked it. But she's a boy."

"Now, Flash! Don't you start any funny ideas! I don't mind what IT is and neither do you!"

"Of course I don't. But I just have a sort of feeling."

I had all sorts of feelings and all of them good and pleasant to have. I felt extremely well and full of energy, and at the same time full of content - a strange combination, for one did things about the house and made plans and used the energy in such a satisfactory way. It was not the energy that strives after something. It was energy moving forward to a foreordained conclusion, so that there was no haunting sense of effort being perhaps misdirected. There was no uncertainty. It is a most strange thing, to feel so much alive, to be so much a part of life and yet be completely free from uncertainty.

I was now living in a world within a world, living inside a sphere within a sphere, like these amazing sphere-enclosing spheres that the Chinese can carve out of jade. In this innermost world of mine I was protected on all sides, insulated against the normal wear and tear of the events of every day, so that of this time I remember only a blur of happy contentment and very few of the actual details of what happened. I remember that one night Twice came home with a guilty look about him and eventually confessed that he had written to my aunt at Reachfar.

"I know that you don't like to be fussed around and have people always about you, Flash, but don't be angry," he said. "I don't mean to be insulting or ungallant or anything, but you *are* a little old to be trying this baby-having thing for the first time, so I've asked Kate to try to find some

woman, just to be here and help around the house and so on."

"Why should I be angry, my pet?" I said. "It's a very good idea, and if it eases your mind in any way let's have a dozen women here if you like."

I think that it was about then that Dram came in, stepping very proudly, carrying a large, half dead water rat from the burn which he laid like an oblation – if that's the word – at Twice's feet.

"Dram, it's beautiful," Twice said. "Take it away, for pity's sake, and kill it."

Dram sat back on his bottom, put a large forepaw on the rat and looked solemnly at Twice.

"He won't kill anything," I said. "I think his mouth is too soft or something."

"Well, so is mine!" said Twice. "Dram, take it outside, there's a good dog. Thank you very much."

At these words Dram lifted his rat on to the arm of Twice's chair, struck it a stupefying blow with his paw, left it and went to lie in the middle of the floor with a pleased expression.

"My God!" Twice burst out. "Has the brute no sense?"

"Dram!" I said. "Take that beastly rat and GO RIGHT OUTSIDE!"

Dram, hurt and insulted now, picked up his rat, carried it with dignity to the passage door, which he butted open with his square head, and disappeared, rat and all, into Monica's quarters.

"Holy cow!" said Twice.

"Lucy's cat will kill it and put Dram out," I said comfortably. "Of course, the day will come when *he* will kill the cat, but at the moment this baby and I are not worried about that . . . And Dram has a *lot* of sense. He hasn't widdled in the house for over three weeks."

"That's wonderful. But what is he going to do with that hole he has dug in the front garden? Bury a horse?"

Before I could say anything in extenuation of Dram's weakness for excavation there was a hideous shriek from the passage and Lucy hurtled through the doorway and threw herself at Twice.

"It's enormous!" she yelled. "And it's *alive*!"

"You are a liar, you know," said Monica calmly as she

appeared carrying the dead rat by the tail. She bent a wicked eye on Lucy, who was clawing at Twice's shoulder. "But I suppose one excuse is as good as another." She picked the lid off the hot-water stove in the scullery and dropped the dead rat in and then went to wash her hands at our sink. "Come through and have a drink before supper," she called over her shoulder. "You have to collect your dog, anyway."

"Where is he?" I asked.

"Under my bed. You should have got a bitch. Nothing is safe around here. He is afraid of Lucy."

"One bitch around the place is enough," said Twice, disengaging Lucy, but quite kindly, although with a dirty look at Monica.

She turned her back on Twice in a deliberate way and looked at me. "Well, how is the child?"

"Very well, thank you," I told her.

She looked at my waistline. "I must say it's developing quite a personality. Come on."

We went along the passage and into the different world that was the Ben-the-Hoose.

"Twice and my aunt are trying to find a wet-nurse for me," I said.

"What? Already?"

"You know what I mean - somebody to be around the house and lend a hand."

"A very sound idea. That old trollop" - she jerked her head in the direction of her passage-kitchen and Lucy - "wouldn't have the *nous* to lift the telephone if anything went wrong. I hope they get somebody with some sense. If Lucy couldn't cook I'd poison her!"

Out of my serenity and contentment at this time I had liking and toleration brimming over and to spare for all the world, and I thought Monica was a little hard in her attitude to Lucy, and blamed it on the fact that Monica was under a fair amount of stress all day at Slaters' Works and probably found a scene about a half dead rat (being herself neither afraid of nor revolted by rodents) a silly and unnecessary irritation during her evening. I apologized for Dram's misdemeanour, but I was little affected by Monica's whip lash comments not only on Lucy but on everything. Nothing outside of myself seemed to affect me as formerly, as if I were encased in some elemental and invisible armour.

When my aunt wrote to say that we were 'in luck and Daisy Mackintosh would come', and Daisy Mackintosh was due to arrive at Crookmill the day after the letter, I was unaffected by that too. I got the spare bedroom ready to receive her, but in my mind she had no reality as a person. My world was growing smaller and smaller, closing in and shutting out everything except the baby, Twice and myself.

When I was a child of five and went to the village school up at my home for the first time Daisy Mackintosh had been one of the 'big girls' in the 'Big Room', which meant that she was fourteen and would leave school altogether that summer. Since that time I had never seen Daisy Mackintosh, for she had worked at home on her people's croft for a few years and then went away to Edinburgh to train as a nurse. As I was making up the bed in her room I remembered that I had heard once, when home on vacation from my university, that Daisy Mackintosh had never completed her nursing training, but instead had married some man who had given her two children and then got himself run over by a bus. It was typical of my aunt and my family in general, I thought, to ignore this occurrence which had taken place in far-off Edinburgh and not in their own countryside, and be sending me 'Daisy Mackintosh', who was really Mrs So-and-So in spite of all their ignoring.

When Twice and I met her at the station she turned out to be a tall, dignified-looking woman with an authoritative look, as she got out of the train, as if the entire British railway system were under her personal control. Her first words, therefore, were most unexpected when she came to me and clutched at my hand and said: "You're Janet! Mrs Alexander, I should say! I'd know you anywhere by your Granny! Goodness, I'm in a perfect daze! I'm so nervous, travelling by myself!"

"You must be tired, Mrs— I'm sorry, my aunt wrote nothing but Daisy Mackintosh."

"And what *would* she write? It's Ramsay, but Daisy will do fine. And this is Mr Alexander?"

She had a coy way of saying it that made me want to say: "No, he is Napoleon Bonaparte," but Twice held out his hand and said: "I am very glad to see you here, Mrs Ramsay."

She clung to his hand with both of hers and gazed earnestly

into his face. "And I'm so pleased to be here! I'm not the kind of woman that likes to be all on her own."

"Let's get your luggage," said Twice hastily and strode away up the platform.

When we got back to Crookmill, of course, we had Monica and Lucy in for a drink and to meet Daisy, and at once she and Lucy went off into some conversational world of their own in which we three had no part.

"And you have no children?" Daisy asked at one point.

"No." Lucy sheered away from this question. "My second husband was in the Army and—"

"I have the two boys, Hugh and David—"

"And my third husband was—"

"People have said to me I should marry again, but—"

"This is a classic!" Monica hissed at Twice and me in a corner of the kitchen. "*Two* of them! God help the ~~males~~ of Ballydendran now!"

I think, but I am not sure, that it was Twice who ~~coined~~ the phrase or composite name for them, ~~Loose-and-Done~~, but it came into our vocabulary that evening and ~~was~~ ~~stayed~~

instinct to keep their hands and eyes in, as Twice would put it in his calmer moments.

Loose and Daze, had a casual observer seen them walking down the street or sitting in a train, would have looked like what they were, two not ill-looking, well-dressed, respectable widows, with pretty, not over-intelligent faces; going contentedly about their small daily business, but when I look "back to this time at Crookmill I see that they brought into the house and kept alive there what I can only describe as a consciousness of sex. The windborne seed has no future without the soil that it finds fertile, the flying spark is on its way to extinction unless it strikes dry tinder, so Loose and Daze might have gone together to a million other places without this influence of theirs exerting itself, but Crookmill at this time was the soil for the seed, the tinder for the spark. There was the further accident of old Mattha, who, largely out of his liking for Twice, I think, coupled with that loneliness to which old people in retirement are prone, had attached himself to the household and who, in his very nature, was the force of polar opposition to the motivating force behind Loose and Daze.

And, of course, the spring, that notorious season, was now in full cry round the green hills and among the little woods of Ballydendran. I remember the evenings, when, as long as it was light, Twice and I – and often Monica – would grub about in the garden, 'helped' by old Mattha, who sat on the wall and spat and made acid comments on the efforts of two of his many grandsons whom he coerced into working for us and whom we had to pay in secret because he did not approve of 'folk gettin' peyd tae get learnt'. Loose and Daze were taking a strong part in the social life of the town and were in a frenzy of sewing-meetings and whist drives and bazaars connected with the church; and although Twice pointed out that if they stayed at home and simply gave the church the money they spent to hire a hall and have tickets printed for whist drives, not to mention what they paid for cloth for sewing-meetings and bus fares to get to the meetings themselves, the church would do much better, they merely smiled archly at him and said: "You old stick-in-the-mud, you!" and went on their way a-whoring, as Monica put it. At least, their church and charitable activities mostly saved us in the evenings from the embarrassment of having

them and Mattha in the garden at the same time. Mattha, on the whole, had a low opinion of women, coupled with a keen eye for the foibles of humanity in general. He also had an overweening belief in the right and freedom of the individual to express any opinion about anyone, either in that person's hearing or out of it.

Loose referred, privately, to Manina as 'that dirty, spinning, ill-natured old man', and Daze, in her own idiom, called him 'that thrawn, cantankerous, codd crainer'. But of course Mattha too had his opinions and was less private about them. He watched Loose and Daze one evening, from his seat on the wall, go down the road to catch the bus, and when they were no more than out of earshot, he spat and said: "We can see by the waggle o' their backsides with them after, Oud that the pare sowl o' a man that gets carried away by those mill-stanes!"

For the rest of us at this time it was all very amusing, this push-pull of sex comment, and for me the domestic life of the household was ideal. I could be alone if I wanted to be but there was always somebody about and within all that there were all people I liked and some of whom I loved. It went on like that until one evening at the end of May when Loose and Daze had a whist drive and at six o'clock I rang up to say that she and Twice would be late because some people who should have arrived at the works for a meeting that morning had not come and the bus was late. This caused one of these wordy exchanges between Loose and Daze that they so enjoyed but which were so tedious for everyone else.

"I'll stay with Janet - you go. You can manage on your own for tea as well as your own."

"No, you go. All you have to do is pick up I'm Peter and play in my place and she'll look after my wife and me."

"But I'm here to look after—"

"Nonsense, my dear! Besides, you missed the last one remember, with your toothache."

"I know, but—"

"You'll both go!" I said. "Good heavens, you'd think I was half-witted!" and I pushed them out of the house.

Mattha did not come along that evening, but I had a happy time, playing gramophone records and sewing nightgowns for the baby and finding myself some supper, too.

about nine o'clock I discovered that it seemed to be very cold and went out into the front garden to look at the weather. It *was* cold, with all the indications of one of these late May frosts which can do so much damage to a garden. There was nothing I could do and what I had already done was silly, for I had let Dram out and he went galloping across the burn in the dim light and in a few seconds had all the sheep and lambs in the adjoining field running for their lives, while he cavorted behind them, having the time of *his* life. In sheep country, the worry of the dog-owner is that word 'worry'. A young dog chases sheep for fun, but he can so easily get his teeth into the wool and start to shake it as he would an old rag, and then he gets the taste of blood and the degeneration is complete. I have never known a sheep-worrier to be cured except by destruction.

I ran down the path to the bridge, calling the pup's name, and I saw him check in mid-caper and turn to come back to me, so I stopped on the bridge to wait for him. I remember the slip of my foot as I stopped, I remember the clutching slither I made as the wooden parapet cracked, and I remember the boulders under my back and the coldness of the water as I struck the bed of the shallow stream only a few feet below. Twice and Monica found me about half an hour later, Dram shivering in the water beside me. I had lost my baby, I had precluded all possibility of having another baby and I had broken something in my back so that I could not move my legs. It was as simple and as complete as that . . .

PART THREE

A MERCIFUL MENTAL anaesthesia comes to the very ill. I do not mean coma or complete unconsciousness, for I was, within the medical meaning of the word, conscious from the fourth day after my fall when I came out of the anaesthetic that had been given me for the full examination of my back and the encasing of my body from waist to hips in plaster. I could see, hear, speak, swallow, smile at Twice, and even put out my hand and touch him, but it was not until about four weeks had elapsed and the doctors were extremely pleased with my progress and everybody was looking less anxious that I realized how damnable I felt all their good cheer to be and became conscious of the full enormity of my situation. I was alive, I had not pain of any kind – but I might never walk again.

Some fine and great books have been written by fine and great men and women about their incredible conquests of all kinds of physical disabilities, but I think that I can say of myself with conviction and with truth that I am neither fine nor great. I am of poor metal and of small spiritual stature. And this was my first failure in life. As a small person, of small ability and small ambitions, I had never tried to do anything very big and I had succeeded in all the little things I had tried to do. Now I had tried to do the most ordinary thing that any normal female animal can do, and my attempt had ended like this. And all my life I had enjoyed, consciously, my ability to move. I had loved the acts of walking, running, dancing – I had enjoyed them and had studied my enjoyment of them as a gourmet watches himself enjoying some carefully chosen dish. And never in my life had I been ill at all. I had never spent a day in bed, never been unable to attend to my own toilet, never had been dependent on anyone to help me with the normal functions of my body . . .

Do not be alarmed. This is a story of My Friend Monica and it is not going to turn into an opus on my operation, but it is against the background of my illness, my irritability, the anxiety that I caused and the distortions of my sick mind that the story of My Friend Monica developed.

I am a fortunate person. Many people like me and several love me deeply; and the large living-room of Crookmill, in a corner of which, near a window, I lay on my surgical bed, should have been a happy place. Nothing came in there but kindness to me and the desire to help me and – oh, how my mind and nerves were frayed by it all.

"Thank you for the flowers. They are beautiful!"

"Thank you, Monica – it's just the right colour and *real* linen!"

"Thank you, Twice. I love it."

"Thank you, Daze, for the bedpan."

"Thank you, Twice; I didn't know it was published yet."

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Damn you! Damn you all! And Twice and his endless, cheerful patience – the cursed and damned patience that was clamped down over all the bubbling volcanic fire and passion – my heart was sick to death when I looked at him.

The atmosphere of the house in the midsummer sun was bright and gay; the visitors came and went all day and every day; Dram daily became more intelligent and amusing. The gaiety became a little forced on the days when the doctor came, accompanied by the consultant from Edinburgh, and there would be a silence when they drove away, which one of us would eventually manage to break with some lightsome quip. Crookmill, people said, was the happiest place in the world; it did them good to come there, they said; they had never seen, they said, an invalid who was so patient and cheerful and contented – and *such* a sense of humour, too, they said.

Towards the end of August we had some sullen, thundery weather when the air was leaden with weight and the sky was leaden in colour. The doctors came and went one day, and I was having what, in theory, was my quiet afternoon spell. This was the worst part of the day, just as three o'clock to four was the worst hour of the long night. During the last week I had arrived at a certain acceptance of hopelessness, and as I lay on the tilted bed in the dim light behind the drawn curtains I thought of my mind drifting, a frail craft, on this lonely, grey sea of hopelessness, lost and wandering, rudderless, under a sky that had no stars. It became clear to me that there was only one thing to do in such a case. The wretched little ship must be made to sink, to disappear for

over into the depths of this uncharted sea which would not mark the event by so much as a ripple. Yes. That was it. Pull out the peg and let the sullen grey waters flow in. It would be quite simple. Just wait for the next evening when Loose was on duty, get her flustered to the extent where she would leave the sleeping stuff within reach, and then, when she had gone away and you were alone on the grey sea, you could sink into it for good and it would be better for everybody.

I felt quite pleased and cheerful, now that I had solved the problem of the grey sea. I had looked so long and so carefully for land, a harbour or even a sandbar that might betoken a shore. It was good to have solved the problem of that limitless sea – you did not try to sail across it, looking for land. There *was* no land, only the deep nothingness that lay beneath its grey surface, and that was where you had to go. Just wait for a night when Loose . . .

I do not mean to convey the impression that from the moment I knew that I might not walk again I went steadily downhill into this slough of depression that took on in my mind the character of a grey, shoreless sea. Indeed, it would be more accurate to say that I did not move at all mentally, but that the grey sea was a thing of which I gradually became aware and that slowly but steadily it seemed to come nearer to me, like the process of erosion on some coastlines. Like most coastlines, the coastline of my essential self was of varied character, with soft unresisting sandbanks at some points, where the sea made an easy encroachment; and at other points I found in myself rocky promontories, against which the sullen water sucked towards and sighed towards its ebb and pushed towards and rumbled towards its flow without making much progress.

The first soft sandy barrier to be overrun, for instance, was any sort of pride in my own outward person. I came to hate the kindly daily toilet that was performed for me – the sponging of my skin, the brushing of my hair, the trimming of my fingernails. I did not want any of it – I wanted to be left alone. In a similar way I lost my pride and interest in my house and garden, although I had been brought up in the tradition of meticulous housekeeping and had applied this training at Crookmill as a natural part of my character. What did I care about the polish on the silver or the growth

in the garden? These things mean nothing if you are not a part of them – they owe, for you, their very existence to your ability to pour out tea from the polished pot or your sense of the tilled earth under your feet, or the tenderness of the green shoot that brings the gentleness to your fingers. Little by little I was thus being overtaken by the grey waters. The books, the poetry, the beautiful words of all the poets were swept away, reduced to a sodden grey mass of meaningless pulp where no beauty remained. And last of all, the people were engulfed – all the visitors, Loose, Daze, Mattha, Monica, my family and, last of all, Twice – until I found myself alone on a bleak, rocky headland, against which the sea lapped and bit and sucked and swept, persistent and insidious, towards greedy destruction.

I held my place on the headland for a long time, for the time of thought is not days and hours but a far swifter thing. For three months of ordinary days and hours of time I had tried to outmanoeuvre the encroaching sea, and that is a long time in the thought world. And for another long time of thought I had tried to defy the sea from the rocky headland of my lone self. Force me to destruction, would it? *Me?* Nothing could do that! I could not be destroyed. I had seen things, felt things, touched things, smelled things, thought of things in a way that no other person had or could. I was unique. I was the only one of my kind, I, this person, known to the world as Janet Sandison Alexander. I was immortal, beyond destruction. I was the one who had seen the purple spikes of the orchis rise between their spotty leaves and who had looked up into the bells of the fritillaries, seeing there something that only I and no other person could see . . . But the sound of the grey waters overcame the inner voice which was growing steadily more faint.

It was this loss of the value of memory and experience – this disintegration of the main girders of the structure of the 'I' – that drove me to thoughts of suicide. Almost invariably after a case of suicide has been considered by a court the verdict brought in has the rider 'while of unsound mind' or 'while the balance of the mind was disturbed', which implies that the suicide destroyed himself because he was unaware of what he was doing. Or does it imply that only a madman's mind could run so counter to the life force as to contemplate self-destruction?

If I had committed suicide in 1947 the probable verdict of 'while the balance of the mind was disturbed' would have been just enough, but either of those two implications which I have quoted would have been completely unjust, for I was contemplating suicide because I was fully aware that my mental balance had been upset by my physical condition and I did not wish to continue to live in that state of mental disintegration which was anathema to me. As that grey sea encroached, eating away tenet after tenet, standard after standard, emotion after emotion, until no memory, no thought, no encounter, no experience had any value, to go on living – in the sense that breathing in and out is to be alive – became pointless. If I could have escaped into cantankerous ill-temper and have become a 'difficult invalid' I would have done it. If I could have convinced myself that I was a martyr to my past sins and could have taken to hysterical religion, I would have done it. If I could have become a professional invalid, interested in my ailment and trying new doctors, pills and treatments every week, I would have done it. But I could do none of these things. I simply was not interested in being or doing anything. My mind was paralysed as surely as were my legs; I was aware of it and could do no more to mend it than I could to mend my legs. The legs, will as I might, would not move, and the mind, too, seemed to be inert, watching itself die from the edges inwards, as a green leaf withers and desiccates at the onset of winter.

In every island there is some hard core of rock that will be the last to erode away; in every leaf there is some main vein of sap that will be the last to desiccate; and in every mind there is some resistance that will be the final bastion to fall. After Twice had receded into the grey meaningless unreality, I found that by remembering back to my childhood at my home at Reachfar and thinking forward in time I could make Twice become real again by remembering him there, in that place, when I had taken him home to meet my family for the first time, but quite soon even that began to fail. Reachfar began to draw away into the mist of time and space as if it were a story I had heard long ago; a picture I had seen through dusty glass or a dream that I could only vaguely remember. The grey sea, featureless, horizonless, limitless, no longer stormy and cruel now, for it had me beaten and it

knew it, stretched away on every side and lapped, lapped at the unresisting shores.

One day, when the clock struck four and it was time for me to become the bright, cheerful invalid again, the sea had insidiously made a big gap in the headland and was sucking and slithering about in the darksome cave it had found in my mind, so that I could hardly bother to open my eyes, when Twice's voice said: "Hello, there! A nice private evening - Monica is off somewhere in a temper in her car and I've told Loose and Daze to go to the movies. Are you ready for tea?"

I pushed my eyelids up and saw him in the doorway. "Yes, please," I said.

He went round the room, drawing back curtains so that the full light came flooding in, striking all the familiar things which had only one shape for me now that I always saw them from the same angle. Some of them were beautiful things, some ugly, like the Animated Bust which sat on top of a bookcase in a darkish corner, but a few months ago I had loved them all. Now I hated them. They were not themselves any more, but mere flat shapes and forms that always looked the same, a jumble of lines and angles and curves against a flat wall. The grey sea was better, the sullen grey sea. Anything was better than this flattened, distorted, unreal world.

With his large yet neat efficiency Twice came in with the tea tray and began to sort plates and knives on to my bed table and on to a small table for himself. This was what I had done to him - turned him into a cross between a sick nurse and a butler, the shocking indignity of it!

"There!" he said, giving me a cup of tea and handing the bread and butter. "And what's your news?"

I whipped up my nearly dead horses of simulated interest. "Dram found a wasps' nest this morning and got his nose all stung up, and Daze had to sponge him with ammonia to get the swelling down. It made his eyes water—" I hoped that my laughter sounded convincing and it seemed to be. "I've never seen a dog crying before!"

"I thought he seemed a bit subdued when I came home. By the way, I wrote to the kennels the other day."

"Oh? Why?"

"I've ordered a bitch to be a missis for Dram. I think it would be fun to breed some pups, don't you? I'd love to see Dram doing the proud papa."

Oh. Here we were. We could not breed children, but we could be ever so clever. We could breed dogs.

"That's a wonderful idea," I said.

"We could make a run out there by the wall and you could see everything that went on. A litter of pups can be very funny—"

"Twice, you think of everything! I'll love it. Thank you."

So now the carefully planned carnation bed, specially made because Twice loved carnations, was to be turned into a wired-in run for pups to amuse the invalid. All this damnable self-sacrifice in small things and in great — it must be brought to an end.

"Twice, I thought you were going to Sir Andrew's to-night?"

"No. Tomorrow night."

"Oh."

It was not true. He had altered the day of that visit. More and more, he was altering, postponing, cancelling altogether appointments of that sort to meet the exigencies, as he saw them, of my condition. He was going out less and less, seeing increasingly little of his friends in the engineering and business worlds, asking them more and more seldom to come to Crookmill. It was as if I held his life between my useless hands and were wringing all the colour and substance out of it.

"You are dispirited tonight, darling," he said suddenly.

He had never accused me of low spirits before. "Nonsense!" I said, smiling at him. "Why should I be? It would be wicked if I were when I appreciate everybody and everything around me so much! I always feel that I can never thank you all enough—"

"Oh, rubbish!" He rose and stood looking down at me for a moment.

"Oh, I forgot! I've got a great dollop of flowers in the car for you — absolute fizzers! I've never seen marigolds such a size!"

He dashed out of the room. Marigolds. I like nearly all flowers, but I have a loathing for marigolds. The kind called 'African' I find only bearable at some yards' distance; the flat-faced, many-pétalled, orange ones I dislike even at a greater distance; and the yellow ones, that look like rubber sponges on green wires, I loathe with a deadly loathing at

any distance. And as if loathing by sight were not enough, their rank, pungent, chemical smell nauseates me. Surely, I thought, Twice must know all this? Surely Twice, who would not allow a door or gate-hinge anywhere around the house to creak because it is a sound I hate, must know— You miserable, puling egotist, I told myself. How should he know? In spite of his apparently highly developed instinct for your tastes, why should he know that you like all flowers but marigolds? You don't wear a label with 'I loathe marigolds' written on it! A label? To indicate something about me to Twice? No. Twice and I don't need labels. Or— wait. We, now, are not Twice and I as we were. Since I have been adrift on this shoreless sea I have lost contact with Twice and he must be adrift too. No. No. Twice is never lost and adrift. Yes. Twice, now, could easily have forgotten your dislike of marigolds even if once you told him of it. He could have forgotten. You are no longer the person he knew. You are no longer the person called Flash who hated marigolds. You are a hulk of a cripple, with no small rights of love or hatred. The only right you have is to express gratitude for all the love and care and thought and kindness that surrounds you—that is your right and your duty . . .

Twice was back in the room, smiling jauntily, carrying nothing other than the poison-green metal vase, full of stinking, canary-coloured marigolds, rubber sponges almost three inches in diameter on wiry stems about three feet high—the most monstrous, obscene and repulsive vegetable growth I have ever seen in my life.

"I have to put them in the Storied Urn," he said. "We've got nothing else big enough. Aren't they enormous?"

He set the vase on the bedtable, right in front of my face. The smell caught at my throat, nausea clutched my stomach.

"They are beautiful. Thank you—"

I looked up at him, and suddenly a grey glint of steel came into his blue eyes. He snatched the vase and hurled it with all his force across the room, where it crashed on to the Animated Bust, whereupon both fell to the floor, breaking to smithereens a crystal bowl and a china cigarette box on their way.

"Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!" Twice shouted before the noise of breaking crystal and china had died away and Dram, terrified, crawled out from under my high bed.

"Thank you! They are beautiful! You know how you hate the bloody sight and stink of them! Have you no guts? No mind of your own? How did you turn into an automaton that can only say Thank you?" He bent over the bed until his convulsed face was only inches away from mine. "Can't you see what you are doing? I live and breathe and am what I am only through you and *for* you, and you are pulling away behind a screen of Thank you, thank you, thank you!"

He seized my shoulders in a trembling grip, and Dram, in a frenzy of divided loyalty, raised his black nose to the ceiling and gave vent to a dreadful howl. Suddenly Monica was in the room, behind Twice, her hands on his shoulders, dragging at him, her face greenish-white, her eyes blazing.

"You damned savage!" she spat like some creature of the cat tribe. "Let go! Come away!"

Twice's grip on me relaxed, Monica's grip on him tightened and his face was beginning to draw away from mine when I heard my own voice say: "Let go of Twice! Monica, let go!" The green-white lids dropped over the blaze in her eyes. "Let go of Twice!" I repeated, and then: "Good God! What's the world coming to if he and I can't have a private row in our own house?" Monica's hands fell to her sides. "As for *you*—" I looked at Twice and with horror I felt rage boiling in me and heard my voice rising—"you made that damned mess over there, you clean it up! And so help me when I get out of this accursed bed and back on my feet I'll break the pair of that crystal bowl over your bad-tempered skull! Get out of here, Monica! This is no place for you—this row isn't nearly over yet! Get out!"

Monica backed away out of the room and closed the door. I was only dimly aware that she had gone and now my brain was black with rage. I had not felt so alive since the evening of my accident and I did not know what had made me so angry, but I did not care. I let myself go in a debauch of blind rage, with the marigolds as a peg to hang it on and Twice as the rock against which to throw my pent-up fury.

"Bringing me those stinking weeds! Get them out of here! Get them *out*, I say!" I yelled, and Dram, deciding now that the whole performance was some new kind of game, jumped round the room, barking and rushing at Twice who was scrounging about picking up splinters of crystal and broken marigolds. "You *knew* I loathe them, that the smell of them

"That's the trouble with things. Like today — I thought I *had* to say thank you all the time. The half is not told one."

"No. And to misquote Browning: 'That's what all the blessed *faith* is for', Flash."

"Faith?"

"Yes, faith. Listen, the half is not told you. It is not told to me, either, but you did not come out of that night in May alive for no reason at all. I cannot tell you all the reason why you are still alive, but I know part of it."

"What?"

"I do not think that whatever made me so dependent on you could pull all my props away like that and leave me all alone. I need you so much that you *had* to be left alive."

"But — like this?"

"What is the alternative? The empty bed? The empty room? The empty world? For me — like this will do. And I am eternally grateful for it. But I know more than this — like this will not *have* to do, for always. You are going to dance, walk and run again, Flash."

I stared at him and shook my head. "The doctors—"

"They don't know. They admit they don't know. And they don't. But I know."

"Twice, it is no good having pipe dreams. We have always gone for the truth—"

"This is the truth. It is the half that has been told to me and not to you or to the doctors or to anyone else. You and the doctors have got to have faith, but I don't. I *know*. And I am secure and happy and I want to share my happiness with you. I want you to be just yourself and cuss when you feel like cussing and be happy with me as you have always been. I know that it is hard for you, for you have only my word for things and the baby will—" It was the first time that the baby had been mentioned. "—the baby will never be again, but try to believe me — you are going to walk again, Flash."

"I always *have* believed you and believed in you—" I said very hesitantly.

"Yes, but this is more difficult — you must try."

"All right, Twice. You are sure?"

"I am absolutely certain," Twice said, and his voice had the ring of true gold against true gold.

There was no overnight miracle. I did not get up and walk

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makes me sick! How dare you bring them in here? How dare you?"

I was aware that I was raving, clutched in the toils of debauch, as a drunkard must feel when he takes another and another drink, but, like the drunkard, I could not stop. Like the drunkard with his drink when he can no longer smell or taste it, I was not thinking or hearing the words my voice was saying – I was conscious only of poison pouring out of me as the drunkard is conscious of spurious comfort pouring in through his gullet. It must have been a bestial exhibition, but it broke down at long last into exhausted sobs and tears which ran hot down my face and gathered in a pool at my throat because I had not the energy left to raise a hand to wipe them away. I became conscious of the touch of linen on my face and looked up at Twice, silent, absorbed in the plying of his handkerchief. Lying on the bed beside me was the oxidized metal vase, a large dent in its plump green belly. I laid my hand on it.

"It says ha-home sweet ha-home!" I sobbed.

"Aye, so it does, and it is quite right. This is more like the thing. I like to see a little life about the place . . . Now I'm going to get some water and we'll have a dram and a nice quiet chat and see if we can remember what it was that we had all that row about. We haven't had such a rowdy one since the day you hit me over the head with the file of papers in the office and I've never even known how that one started either." He fetched a jug of water, poured out two tots of whisky, diluted them and brought the glasses over to the bedside. "Why *did* you suddenly hit me over the head that day? I could see no reason for it and it struck me as being most damnably unjust."

"You made a crack about me being a good housekeeper."

"What was wrong with that?"

"Wrong with it? I wanted to marry you more than anything in the world and I thought you didn't like me and were being funny with me. God, I was mad!"

"So was I!"

"You called me a Highland vixen and shook me."

"There was nothing wrong with that either. I like Highland vixens and enjoy shaking them, up to a point."

"That was the part that you didn't tell me that day – that you liked Highland vixens." I took a sip from my glass.

taken him to my home at Reachfar, of Twice standing in the assembly shop at Slaters' looking narrow-eyed at something that displeased him and whistling 'Scotland the Brave' while he thought of ways and means of improving things. I do not think that at this time when he came into the room I even saw him as he stood there. There was, as I have said, no present. What came into the room as seen from my insulated sphere was the thought of Twice, a memory, and what I saw with my mind was some picture of him from a deeply experienced moment that was now part of the past.

Similarly, I did not see the Monica of the now, of the present moment that was elapsing outside this sphere of mine. When Monica was in the room with me I lived again our days during the war and went over again many of our absurd conversations and looked back with laughter on our many even more absurd love affairs.

I think it is proof that I was not really alive but in a state of suspended animation when I can say with truth that I have few memories of how Twice and Monica looked or of what they said at this time. Normally I have a good memory for conversations, and my mind is full of clear pictures from the past of people dear to me standing or sitting in certain attitudes, the light striking their faces in a certain way, the line of a bookcase or the fold of a curtain framing them in certain angles and colours. There are few such pictures of Twice and Monica from this time and fewer still of Loose, Daze, Mattha and other people. Indeed, the only picture I have of Loose, Daze and Mattha is one of all three of them, united for once to express strong indignation at me to Twice - indignation that was really a cloak for their worry because they thought, I believe, that I was going mad.

Mattha had brought into the house some petrol in a vinegar bottle, had left it on a shelf in the kitchen, and Daze, thinking the bottle contained vinegar as per the label, tried to pickle some beetroot with it. The composite Loose-and-Daze and Mattha arrived beside my bed to lay complaints against one another.

"That yin there had nae bizniz touchin' ma things on ma shelf in the kitchen, onyway!" said Mattha.

"It might have gone off!" said Daze.

"And set the place on fire!" said Loose.

"In a vinegar bottle!"

the next morning, and during many ensuing nights often I would find myself adrift hopelessly on the sullen grey sea, but there was something I could do now. When I found myself adrift with the greyness all around, I could 'cuss' and call out, but often I did not have to go so far as to call out to people, for if I listened very hard I could hear the ring of gold on gold, and if I looked in the direction from which the sound came I would see a pinpoint of light, which was the lighthouse on the rocky island which was Twice in his loneliness, and if I tried with all my force against the push of the grey water I came time and again to the shore.

And, of course, the world did not stand still just because Flash Alexander was unable to walk. The big world and the small world of Ballydendran inside it, and the smaller world of Crookmill inside the latter, kept turning, and in the smallest world my plaster cast was taken off, and in the next smallest world Slaters' Works of Ballydendran turned into a subsidiary of the huge Allied Plant Limited, and in the great big world away outside people got on with organizing a pact for world peace and with the making of deadlier weapons for world war. But the events of the outside worlds were not real to me - hardly anything was real to me at that time.

It was as if I were suspended in space-time in a sphere again, but this time a sphere fabricated of some insulating material so that I could see and hear what was happening around me but was powerless to experience events in the sense of taking thought of them, making deductions from them, enjoying them or being saddened by them. Enclosing the sphere that held me, like the atmosphere that enwraps the earth, was the life I had known before I became ill, and beyond that, like the stratosphere, was the life I would have when I could walk again. There was no present, for I was teaching myself not to contemplate it, for thought of the here and now of the present brought the vision of the grey sea to my eyes and the sound of its eternal ebb and flow to my ears.

I lived, to all appearances, in my surgical bed in the gay household of Crookmill all these months, but I was, in actual fact, living largely in the past, re-experiencing happiness that I had enjoyed in the former years of my life. When I thought of Twice, it was not of Twice *now* that I thought, but of Twice when I had first met him, of Twice when I had first

taken him to my home at Reachfar, of Twice standing in the assembly shop at Slaters' looking narrow-eyed at something that displeased him and whistling 'Scotland the Brave' while he thought of ways and means of improving things. I do not think that at this time when he came into the room I even saw him as he stood there. There was, as I have said, no present. What came into the room as seen from my insulated sphere was the thought of Twice, a memory, and what I saw with my mind was some picture of him from a deeply experienced moment that was now part of the past.

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"It might have gone off!" said Daze.

"And set the place on fire!" said Loose.

"In a vinegar bottle!"

"Like an explosion!"

"We had them all piled up in a heap at first," I said, "but then we decided that they were a zoo."

It was probably very fortunate that Twice came in just at this point, for after he had listened to their indignation at me for not taking a serious thing seriously and had chased them out of the room, I was able to explain to him quite reasonably that the word 'explosion' had merely made me think of one of Monica's and my word conversations of long ago and I had spoken the thought aloud.

I once told Monica over some wartime gin that the word 'explosion' always made me think of a prickly bundle of all those terms and signs that we have in the written form of our language — a great jumbled heap of exclamation marks all exclaiming and question marks questioning and cedillas and umlauts and diphthongs and ampersands and asterisks all jangling, with, precariously balanced on top, the two little dots called that word I can never spell, 'daoerisis' or something. Monica, of course, said that this whole idea was quite wrong. She said that all these signs and terms are what is the zoo of the word world, and when I thought of this I tended to agree with her. We then went into detail on the matter of the word-world zoo. We decided that the asterisk is something prickly, like a porcupine; that the umlaut is a snake and that the diphthong is a large, hairy animal like the buffalo, from which biltong might be obtained, we thought. The cedilla, of course, is an insect, and the ampersand one of the burrowing, hibernating, smaller animals, while the exclamation mark is a relative of the llama sheep which stands very erect with a long disapproving neck and is always saying: "Ray-a-ly!" It was towards the end of the gin, as I recall, that we got to those two dots that I can never spell, but although I cannot spell them that does not mean that I know nothing about them. . . . As my friend Tom says: "I canna play the fiddle myself, but I can tell when a man iss making a proper mess of *trying* to play it!"

"The da-whatsis-two-dots," I said, "is one of these low, amoebic forms of life that live in water and propagate themselves by dividing themselves into two."

"That's quite wrong!" said Monica. "You should live on water instead of gin if you are seeing the da-whatsis dividing into two! You are all wrong. It's a small white furry

thing, like an ermine, except that it's got two humps on its back like a camel and only migrates into English at Noël."

"Dromedary," I said.

"Don't talk rubbish! A dromedary is nothing to do with this that we are talking about zoos. A dromedary is not an animal at all!"

"Then what?"

"It's a place at Aldershot or somewhere, where the men with the leopard-skin aprons put their big drums when they're not using them. . . . We might as well empty this bottle. We are going to have heads like drums in the morning, anyway."

Yes. My escape from my present was fairly complete. At Crookmill we had little contact with the great big world outside, but the Ballydendran world affected us in that Mr Slater retired from business except for having a seat on the board of what was now called 'The Slater Subsidiary' of which Twice became the managing director. All sorts of expansion and re-planning were going on; all sorts of new people were being drafted in to what was referred to as 'Slater-sub' from the parent company's head office in the Midlands, and Monica was preparing to retire in favour of a new young man called Enderby, who was to fill the position that she had taken over from me.

All this change made my will to escape stronger than ever, I think. I do not like to see the little individual enterprises being swallowed up by the big battalions – it makes me feel that the time of what George Orwell so hideously and aptly called 'the prole' is at hand. Although at the time that Slater-sub was coming into being I did not appreciate all that was happening, I was uncomfortably conscious of the change in the atmosphere about me, a subtle difference in the visitors I saw, a murmuring, subterranean uneasiness in the intimate people about me. In one way I wanted to come out of my escape sphere to investigate it, but I had not quite enough courage. I made little, half hearted probes at the surface of things.

"You will miss Monica," was one of the things I said to Twice when her handover to Enderby was almost completed.

"I will," he agreed, "but there is so much change going on

that one is calloused and does not notice it so much – not nearly as much as one noticed it when Monica took *your* place – that felt like a revolution. In *this* revolution Monica's going is only an incident."

"Monica would not like to be called an incident."

"No. Nor is she – but you know what I mean. I am glad that she's going in one way, though. It means the end of Loose too! She and Daze are going to come to blows about Blair if they're both here much longer."

Mr Blair was the manager of one of the bank branches in the town.

"What I can't understand about them," I said, "is that they are so well organized here in the house. They team up over the cleaning, the laundry and the catering and so on; and they are so well organized in their good works. Why can't they come to some working arrangement about their men? They *always* go after the same one, who always has to run away or marry someone else to escape the 'twae mill-stanes' as Mattha called them. It passes comprehension."

This was the bare truth. Loose and Daze had chased one of the local doctors until he went away for a short holiday and came back with a wife; they had hounded the post-master until he had applied for a transfer; they had bedevilled the minister of Daze's church until his sister who kept house for him had practically forbidden them from the manse; and now they were in full cry after this wretched bank manager, who suffered from acute bronchitis in the winter and from duodenal ulcers all the year round, and who had enough to worry him, I thought, without Loose and Daze horning in.

"In any well-organized community," Twice said, "we'd be forced to keep them tied up, like people who keep jaguars for pets. . . . Hello, Monica!"

"What d'you know?" said Monica, coming into the room. "Loose tells me she is going to supper with old Blair at his house tonight!"

"Keep your voice down!" said Twice. "Daze is in the kitchen. Is this the old one-two, do you suppose?"

"Looks like it. The tête-à-tête is usually Loose's trump card. She is very good at the homey little woman thing, especially when she is playing on *their* ground. Daze is more of a *social* success, wouldn't you say?"

"I wouldn't say anything about either of them," I said

sourly, "except that one won't feel comfortable until they are both married."

"What about the poor man?" Monica asked. "They are bound to choose the same one!"

"This is where we came in," Twice said. "Can I help you ladies to a small drink? Then I have to run over to the Crook for a little."

After Twice had gone, Monica and I were having another small drink and chatting of this and that, when Daze came in and said: "The supper's all ready and the table's all laid there. I don't feel very well. I am going to lie down."

Monica and I looked at each other, and then Monica said: "I'm sorry, Daze. What about a drink? Some aspirin? Have you a headache?"

"No."

"Have you caught a chill, do you think?"

"No. No. I think it's my heart," she said, with a dramatic gesture of hand to side.

I saw Monica bite her lip and turn away, ostensibly to light a cigarette, but when you are in bed and immobilized from the hips down you cannot turn away to hide the giggles that are threatening to bubble out between your lips. I pulled hard at all my muscles as Daze more or less tottered from the room, but when Monica had shut the door and was leaning back against it, shaking with laughter, I found myself saying: "Monica! Monica! Monica!" in a frightened whisper.

She ran to the bedside, her eyes wide with fear. "Jan! What is it?"

"Monica!"

"What is it? What's the matter?"

I reached down and clutched the covers in my hands and pulled them up to expose my legs. "Monica! Look!" She looked at where I pointed, to the muscle above my left knee. "Look, Monica! I can make it *move*!"

"Oh, *Janet*!" she said, whereupon the hard-boiled, hard-drinking, debonair, unshakable woman of the world threw herself across the end of my bed, her red-gold hair like crumpled satin, and burst into a storm of tears. I let her cry for a little while, while I watched myself making my muscle move another time or two and then I said: "That's a hell of a way to carry on! For Pete's sake get us another drink! I want to celebrate!"

"Sorry," she said. "It was a bit dim of me." She began, still sniffing, to pour the drinks. "Janet, I wonder?"

"I don't," I said. "By tomorrow I'll be able to make the other leg do it too! You just wait and see. By next week—"

"No! No! Now, stop it! . . . The first thing we have to do is to report to the doctors about it. And no more of your making other legs do it. It must all be very slow and careful and supervised—"

"Oh, horsefeathers! Either I can move or I can't, and I'm going to!"

We had quite an argument about it and became very heated, and Monica threatened to telephone to Twice at the Crook and to the doctor straight away and went quite a length in general, until in the middle of it all I realized how joyously happy I was and began to laugh like a maniac. Monica, well into the stride of her anxiety, indignation and argument, went rattling on regardless of my laughter, and at last I heard the two words: "—massage and physiotherapy."

"It's *not* therapy!" I shouted. "It's the rappy!"

"Huh?" she said and left her mouth hanging open.

"That word. It's 'the rappy'." She sat down and stared at me. "All right. Get on with your drink," I told her. "You are probably quite right in what you say about doctors and treatment and massage and all that. I won't go for that ten-mile walk tomorrow after all."

"Thank God for that. But I ought to ring Twice."

"You'll do nothing of the sort. It's *my* muscle and I am going to be the one to tell him about it. He'll soon be back. . . . I was telling you about the rappy. You know Old Tom up at home?"

"Certainly I know Tom! What's the matter with you?"

"Nothing. That's an idiom, you fool. Well, Tom can read and write — very unusual for his generation and class up there — and he used to be very proud of both, as well he might have been, and every time he went to Dingwall or Dornoch or Inverness to the market or anything he used to buy a copy of the local newspaper and read it in the train coming home."

"Snob!" said Monica.

"Of course! And more snobbish still, he would come into the house and say to my grandparents: 'I see in the newspaper so-and-so and such-and-such', with the paper sticking

"Well, my grandmother didn't hold with that kind of history. My grandmother had the belief that a deal of history was better forgotten – maybe she was right, at that. Besides, my grandmother had a prejudice against the French in general. The Auld Alliance meant nothing to my grandmother!"

"Auld Alliance!" said Monica and began to giggle. '*Ne me dites pas ça!* I've told you about old Dowie – she came from Perthshire so a lot of the history we heard in the school-room had a certain bias. The Auld Alliance was always coming into it and, I don't know why, I thought of it in private as the Oiled Alliance – maybe something to do with whisky. . . . I say, lets have another."

"That'll be four."

"Sure it isn't five? Never mind, I'm pouring them small. Anyway, if we can't have a tot or two on your muscle, when can we?"

"Here!" said Twice, appearing in the doorway. "Lay off that! Good heavens, that's the whisky ration for a month and *look* at it!"

"We can't," said Monica; "most of it's inside us. But calm yourself. I'll present you with a bottle right now."

"Why?"

"You'll find out." She went out and shut the door.

"What's got under *her* tail *now*?" Twice asked, staring at the door panels. "Has Loose married the banker in this short time?"

He went to pour himself a drink. "No," I said, savouring my moment to the full. "I think it's *me*, even if it is unbiblical grammar."

"You? How?"

"You don't have to sound as if I couldn't get under anybody's tail or even create a modicum of interest. I still just might could, couldn't I?"

"Grammar!" he said, and sat down in his own armchair by the fire with his drink.

This was exactly right. That was where I wanted him to be sitting. I was very happy. I had had a lovely few hours. Monica and I had been catty and mischievous about Loose and Daze – all very harmless – and then my muscle had moved and I had begun to look forward to his coming back and telling him about it. Then I had talked to Monica, the sort of nonsense about my old Tom and her old Dowie and

out words that she and I had not talked for so long. I felt not only that I had been reborn, but that with my rebirth the whole world had taken on a newer, stronger, sharper, more zestful life.

And there was Twice now, with his pipe in his hand, sipping his drink and looking at the fire – contented, I knew now, to have a wife like me, tied to a bed, unable to move. Very quietly, I pulled the covers away so that my legs were exposed. Nature has been kind to me – I have long, quite shapely legs, and a few months in bed had made their skin soft and cosseted-looking but had not altered their shape.

"Twice," I said, "come here. I've got something to show you."

He rose, glass in hand, and came to the bedside, looking into my face. It crossed my mind that for months now no person had looked at my hands or any part of me except my face, and always with this smiling, well-wishing, indulgent look.

"What is it, darling?"

"Look!" I said and pointed and made the muscle move, such an absurdly small movement, just above the knee. Twice put his glass down on the bedtable and laid his pipe beside it, moving very slowly and carefully, as if, suddenly, the whole world and its encircling air were made of something brittle and easy to break. For what seemed a long time he stood looking at me, and at last he said in a low trembling voice :

"I knew it. I *knew* it! Oh, Flash – well done!"

He began to walk up and down the room – I think he had a desire to run outside and rush shouting to the top of the furthest hill – and he seemed to exude joy until the room was at bursting point. As if drawn by some magnetic force, Monica appeared at the back-passage door with her bottle of whisky in her hand, Daze appeared out of her bedroom and Loose came in through the front door with Mr and Mrs Slater.

"Well, what's going on here?" Mr Slater asked, feeling the electric atmosphere.

"It's Flash, sir!" Twice exploded. "She can move a muscle in her leg!"

"Lo and behold!"

"And I'm getting drunk!" Monica shouted, waving her bottle.

There was a general orgy of laughing, hugging and kissing, ending with Twice, quite unable to contain himself now that he had let go, careering round the room embracing the furniture and everything that he bumped into. In the end he bumped into Monica. They were just beside my bed when he caught her in his arms, and, in spite of the surrounding chatter and laughter, the three of us were trapped in a pool of silence. It was all over in a split second. Twice crushed Monica against him, kissed her, released her and hurled himself on top of Dram and kissed him too. Monica swayed on her feet a little, opened her eyes, looked down at Twice rolling on the floor with the dog and began, with unsteady fingers, to unwrap the foil from the neck of the whisky bottle. I was suddenly engulfed in pity for her, and it was a hateful thing, for, badly as I may have described Monica, I hope I have made it clear that I never expected to feel pity for her. It was at the same time, for me, tragic and incongruous, that most shocking of combinations.

"Monica?" I said on a questioning note.

She tilted her head and looked at me sidelong out of her long, veiled eyes, and with my reborn acute awareness of the present I saw, and memory recorded with the speed of photographic film, the beautiful clear line of her jawbone and chin.

"Want a drink?" she asked jauntily. "So do I!"

She had the corkscrew driven now and, bending down, she put the bottle between her knees and drew the cork with a hollow 'Plop!' By this time the rest of the room had returned to some semblance of sanity and I heard Daze saying sourly to Loose: "I thought you were *out* for supper?"

"Well, I'm *not*!" said Loose snappily.

I thought for a moment that they were going to quarrel, but basically they were friends and I know now that their liking for one another was stronger than all their rivalries in housekeeping matters as well as in their affairs of the heart.

"*Not* the way people behave where *I* come from," Loose went on with dignity, conscious now that not only Daze but all of us were listening.

"What happened?" Daze asked, while we all held our breath.

"He sent a message down by that slatternly servant of his to say that he was in bed. It's his stomach," she said. "At least he could have telephoned!"

"My dear, I don't believe a word of it!" said Daze. You would have thought that she and Loose were alone in the room. "I saw him in the High Street this very afternoon — there was no trouble with his stomach *then*!"

"Exactly!" Loose said. "And there was I and no bus back till nine o'clock, so I went up to Mrs Slater's and—"

"And here you are and isn't that nice! Have a drink, you old fool!" said Monica.

Loose and Daze retired to Daze's room with their whisky-flavoured water, no doubt to write the epitaph in the annals of love of Mr Blair, and the rest of us sat around my bed talking, first of my muscle and then of the all-prevailing changes at Slaters' Works.

"It won't be long now until the changeover is complete and all the new staff eased in," Twice said.

"And, lo and behold, Lady Monica will be out of a job!" said Mrs Slater, to whom the idea of Monica working in any way at anything had always been a tremendous joke.

"A woman without a place to lay her head!" said Monica, with a dangerous curl of her lip and a glint in her eye.

I prayed silently that Mirabile Dictu would not blunder us all into some dreadful humiliation, but it was Twice who said: "No need to curl your lip like a vicious horse, Toots!"

"I know you prefer dogs!" Monica said. "No need to make a point of it!"

Twice gave her an ugly, level look out of hard eyes. "Now then, dearie, don't be quarrelsome. I never could bear a woman who got ugly on her drink!"

"You could never bear, full stop!" said Monica.

"Look here," I broke in, trying to keep my voice light and free of tremor, "is this private? Or can we all join in?"

"There is nothing private," said Monica. "In fact, there is nothing — if I may repeat myself — full stop. Anyone who wants a share in it can have it. Me, I'm going to collect that old bag Loose and have my supper and go to bed. Goodnight, everybody."

I was glad when the others went away too, but when Twice came back into the room I felt uncomfortable. One side of me wanted to tell him to be kinder to Monica, but the other side told me that I had not right to interfere. Whatever quarrel lay between them was private to themselves, and I knew that it did not impinge in any way on the relationship between Twice and myself. That was inviolate, I knew, because it was inviolable. So I pushed away the discomfort, I shut Monica out of my mind and retired into the walled city that was Twice's and my private world. This proved to be possible at all times except when Twice and Monica were together in my room, and then it was impossible, for my senses were now fully alert to the world that *they* shared – and a stormy battleground of a world it was – and I was on the watch all the time to prevent a collision between it and the world that belonged to Twice and me.

I once read a story with the title 'There is No Conversation', and I always think of that phrase when I think of Crookmill at this time. Of speech, talk and what my friend Mattha would call 'yackety-yack' there was plenty, but there was no give and take of real exchange between people, no interchange of spiritual coin. I do not know what factor it is that suddenly comes between people and dries up the stream of intercourse between them, leaving them like a series of pools, connected by nothing except the stony water-course, with its few discarded tin cans, broken plates and old boots of speech, talk and yackety-yack. My relationship with Twice – and in a shallower degree with Monica – had been of the sort where nothing is barred. There were between us, at need, the words or the gesture that communicate anything and everything, but that had suddenly ceased to be so. There was suddenly a barrenness, an isolation, as if we were all being drawn apart by some invisible and intangible force.

For some reason that I cannot explain, too, I did not bang my fist on that table, which would have been one of my methods in the past of dealing with such a situation, and say: "Look here, Twice, something is wrong! What is it?" Nor did I use another of my methods and say: "Monica, do you feel that I am peculiar these days? Because I *feel* peculiar." No. I did not say any of those things, partly out of a

cowardly but natural tendency not to awaken a sleeping dog which I felt might be an ugly-tempered beast and largely because the days, weeks and months now were being taken up with 'the rappy', and it was all very joyful and exciting, because it was all so continuously progressive. There were no setbacks or relapses, so I did not want to think of setbacks of any kind. Every day the movement became easier, stronger and more complete, and on the last day of November I was able to stand on my own feet, balanced and unsupported. It was to take a little longer to reach the stage of putting one foot in front of the other in the attempt to walk, but that came, too, in time; and as the story of anyone's 'operation' is always a bore I shall leave it at that, except that in its chronological place I shall tell you of the first time I walked without help.

During this period of 'the rappy' my mind ranged round and round the problem of Monica, but still 'there was no conversation'. She was bitterly unhappy, with a deep unhappiness to which she tried to give neither word nor look nor gesture, going ahead in her debonair way - to the eyes of most people - as she had always done. There were times when I would almost manage to convince myself that what I had seen had been a figment of my sick, off-balance brain, but when this conviction was almost complete, some little thing would happen to demonstrate to me again that the unhappiness was real and close to overwhelming her.

I felt responsible, rightly or wrongly, for what had happened to Monica, for I had brought her into this world of mine, but alongside of this I owe, by nature, so much respect to another person's intimate feelings that any form of interference is utterly repugnant to me. So I picked up my crutches to walk again, while my mind, like a moue or a running wheel, revolved and revolved round Monica and what I could do to help her and how I could do it.

By mid-December the doctors had conceded that I might now be carried to the car and be driven on, without risk of damage to my spine, which meant that in general the world was opening up for me again and, in particular, that we could accept one or two invitations for meals during the Christmas and New Year period. Monica's job at the work was now virtually at an end, her handover to young Indian

completed, and I began to hope that she would leave Crook-mill and Ballydendran without the dreaded collision between her, Twice and myself coming to pass, but she seemed to have no ideas of going away. She spoke of her 'Ben-the-Hoose' as if she intended to end her days there.

For me the atmosphere of the house became more and more grotesque. Loose and Daze, like the innocents they were, were gambolling about making Christmas puddings and cakes and being secretive with coloured paper and tinsel string; all sorts of people, led by the Slaters and Sir Andrew, were besetting Monica, Twice and me (whom they seemed to regard as a single entity, and how shockingly right they seemed to be) with invitations to attend this meal or that, this party or the other. Twice was becoming daily more strained-looking, and daily, almost, Monica was adding another drink to her quota and a little more acid to her tongue. Then, just before Christmas, Monica's sister Sybil paid us a flying visit and stayed for two nights in Daze's room while Loose and Daze packed in together, and I was faced with that thing, the Loame world, in an even more pronounced form than at the time of Gerald's visit, for this time there were two Loame *women*, and two who were very close to one another, for in age Monica and Sybil were separated by only a year, Sybil being the elder of the two. They had all the nursery, the schoolroom and their Parisian convent life together as a background for themselves and as a drop curtain between them and the outside world – or that was how it seemed to me.

On the second afternoon of Sybil's visit, when Monica had gone in to Ballydendran to one of the many 'last meetings' at the works, Sybil came in to sit with me. I cannot tell exactly what happened, but first my happiness became dulled, then it disappeared altogether, and by the time Sybil had said goodbye and had gone Ben-the-Hoose for a meal before catching her train I was very miserable indeed and aware for the first time that my life and my future with Twice were not as secure as I had always thought.

I have always found it easy to remember trivial conversations, especially if in the course of them something has been said to amuse me, but important conversations, by which I mean exchanges which have made some impact of unexpected shock on my deepest feelings, tend to escape my

memory, so that I cannot remember now many of the actual words that Sybil spoke, but I can remember only too clearly the feeling of insecurity and desperate loss that she left behind her.

Sybil had once been described to me by Monica as a 'full-time convener of committees cum bazaar-opener' and all her utterances invariably seemed to me to have the detachment of view of the person who has met with you to discuss some problem that has no bearing either on your personal life or on hers. As I have told you at some length, I had been worried about Monica and her unhappiness, and I wanted more than anything to ask Sybil what was troubling her sister and what I could do to help her, but this was something that I could not do in a direct way in that closed world of the Loames, and especially with the 'bazaar-opener'. All I could do was try to keep the conversation on Monica and try to pick up hints from what emerged - I was coming to the idea that the trouble was a family one of some kind - so I told Sybil how very helpful Monica had been to us all at Ballydendran, how we would miss her when she went, how grateful we were and how I hoped that she realized that we were grateful.

"Grateful?" Sybil said, like a comment from the chair on an unimportant point that some committee member had spoken on for over-long. "I shouldn't bother about that if I were you."

She lit a cigarette, smoothed her hair and flicked a speck of dust from the toe of her shoe, which actions might have been a rearranging of the papers in front of her and the phrase: "Next, please." We continued to chat aimlessly for a long time, but eventually we came back to Monica.

"I have been worried about her lately," I plunged. "She has seemed to be very restless and unhappy."

"You shouldn't worry about *Monica*," Sybil said in her light, clear voice and the emphasis on the 'you' and the 'Monica' was so slight as to be just discernible and no more. "I agree that it is time she left this job she has been doing," she continued, "but, of course, I did not approve of it in the first place. She has been very silly and difficult since 1945 when she came out of the service." She frowned as if the bolt of flannelette for the Women's Institute sewing meeting were late in its delivery.

"The war may have upset her more than we know," I suggested. "One hears of nervous cases developing long after—"

"Nerves? Monica?" Sybil broke in with a polite, tinkling laugh of apology for the interruption of what I had been saying. Really, the laugh indicated, as chairwoman, I do not wish to interrupt the well-intentioned remarks of *any* member, but the time of the committee is limited. She rose to her feet and continued: "Monica has been very spoilt and difficult since she grew up, Janet. I don't think you understand her in the least. The main thing that is wrong with her is that men spoil her — they always have. It is time she left here. I must see some of the family and make a plan about it." She smiled at me graciously. "In the meantime, you must concentrate on getting better and do not worry. It is extremely naughty of Monica to behave like this, but things have not gone too far. They can be put right. Fortunately, it is not too late. Don't worry, Janet. Just take care of yourself and get better completely. Goodbye." And, very much the Country President who had got one more committee meeting off her hands for another month or so, Sybil departed to the Ben-the-Hoose, leaving me feeling that I was so much visited, but very uncomforted, tenantry.

You cannot have read thus far in this chronicle without realizing that I am a very simple-minded sort of creature — indeed, almost what Monica would call 'a natural' about many things, and especially about people that I like and love. If I like a person, I want to help that person in any way I can, and I do not want to hurt that person for anything in the world. I want the people I like to have everything they want to make them happy, big things and little things, and I will always try to help them to get these things, so I wanted Monica to have everything that *she* wanted. Where my simple-mindedness comes in so strongly, though, is that I had never visualized a situation where she, or anyone else for that matter, would try to take Twice away from me. That is not the sort of thing that *I* would have thought of doing had I been in Monica's place, so it did not occur to me that *she* would think of doing it. But, of course, as I told myself as I sat there after Sybil had left me, maybe thinking did not come into it very much. When *I* met Twice, would I not have loved him just as much and wanted him just as much even if he had been the husband of Monica? Did

people think, in these situations? Did thought come into it? I did not know. I did not know anything, except that I loved Twice more than I had ever done and wanted more than ever that he should have what *he* wanted to make him happy.

You might as well, I told myself, put the thing into words and face it. There is no point in dithering about in your mind with vague phrases. Does Twice want Monica instead of you? Quite probably, came the painful answer in my mind. Why shouldn't he? There is not a single way in which Monica cannot make rings round you – she has brains, wit, looks, position, wealth, and she can *walk*, you know – she is a physically normal woman that a man can live with and enjoy as men and women were meant to live with one another, as you and Twice used to live with one another, remember? All that time ago? Away back before you fell on the bridge? Remember?

Yes, but I will walk again. One day soon I will walk, and then. . . . Then? It will be too late. It is too late now. If Twice wants someone else, are you going to compete? You know that you won't. For you, he is lost right now, you know that. And the Loames do not betray one another. Sybil was not sounding a sort of gypsy's warning. Sybil was telling you of what is already a *fait accompli*. It can be put right, she said. Put right! Patched together, flawed for ever and ever. What was that phrase there? Gypsy's warning! Remember that day, that first day on the hill behind the Crook – that day a little over a year and a thousand centuries ago – when Monica told you you had been warned? Even then she could foresee this situation. She could always see further ahead than you could – it is natural with her and her kind to see away ahead, like giraffes having long necks and deep-sea fish having a special kind of eyes. They evolve that way. Oh, she could not foresee that you were going to fall down and break your stupid back – not that. But she could see then that you were not enough of a person to satisfy Twice, and she knew then, too, that she wanted him for herself. And if you were a poor sort of person then, what are you now? A cripple. You will walk again, you say. Oh yes. You will walk. Once again you will be a little pedestrian creature. Pedestrian. You will never be anything else. This accident, this illness, have been nothing more than an over-dramatic melting of

the silly wax things you made for yourself. From wax wings to plaster cast; you should write a nice dreary book about it – it would sell by the million to the morbid. . . .

Remember, remember another thing – remember the night that Twice brought the marigolds in the Storied Urn – the night he made you believe you would walk again? Remember when Monica came in here and caught him by the shoulders? You knew that night – right then you knew that this was between them. Deep down and instinctively, like an animal that crawls along the ground on all fours – that is all you are – you knew it, and what did you do? You went into a screaming, slobbering debauch of rage – a sickening debauch – and now you are hurt in your feelings when a man leaves you for someone else.

He hasn't left me! He won't leave me. . . .

In his mind he has left you. And can you blame him? Oh, it can be put right, as Sybil said, put right. Monica can be dragged away and you can hold on to him. Such a fine thing to do and be – a puling, pathetic cripple holding on to a man who is sick of you and wants to be free! Such a creative thing to do – to create a merry little hell on earth for three people, just to satisfy your miserable little ego. . . .

Stop it, I told myself. You do not know that any of this is true. Sybil did not say anything. Sybil did not. . . .

How does one come to know anything? Seldom does the deep knowledge, the understanding that twists in the mind and the heart like a bright knife, come from one person to another through the medium of the spoken word. This sort of knowledge is a piling up, a rising in temperature, an increase in speed until the moment is reached that is like the moment of birth of a typhoon, when suddenly all the elements are fused into a single blinding force that bursts over the astonished heart and brain. By going back to the beginning, I could trace the development of this thing from the moment when Monica stepped off the plane over a year ago.

There are times in life when all events seem to conspire against one, and this was one of those times for me. It was mid-winter and the Ballydendran winters are severe, so that the roads were either frost- or snow-bound, or sleet was driving before the wind which howled round the Crookmill chimneys, so that fewer and fewer people could come to see

me. Twice was away a great deal, short trips of two nights down to the Midlands or London, and Monica came and went, her comings and goings leaving plenty of field for my speculation.

Suspicion is not a pretty weapon. It is no straight Damascus blade with a sharp point and two cutting edges, but a crude instrument, like the primitive knobkerry, with which the binded mind blunders about, striking now inwards at itself, striking next at the heart, striking next at every small daily event, until nothing in range is clearly defined, but battered and blundgeoned shapeless and meaningless by this weapon of suspicion.

If Monica was away at the same time as Twice, she was *with* him in a sordid, furtive way. If she was at home while he was away, she was staying at home by arrangement with him in order to allay my suspicions. If they were both at Crookmill, I would suggest that Twice go through and fetch Monica to come to us for a drink or a meal. If he accepted the suggestion and went to fetch her, I knew – positively knew – that he could not live except within sight of her; if, as he often did, he responded with: “Oh, why? Can’t we just be ourselves alone for a little while?”, I knew – positively knew – that he was afraid of betraying himself by having her in the room with us.

I was very unhappy, but I was fortunate in that I was not tortured by jealousy, for jealousy seems to be something that has been left out of my composition. I suppose that people love in different ways, just as they walk, speak and reason in an individual manner, and my way of loving does not admit of jealousy. I could imagine all sorts of physical contacts and emotional situations between Twice and Monica, and these imaginings made me very unhappy with a poignant sense of my own loss, but they did not make me jealous in the way of wishing to damage Monica or of wishing to vent spite against Twice. If Monica was the person that Twice wanted and she wanted him, they must have each other. There was nothing that I could do because in my way of loving there was nothing to be done. All the love I had to give lay between me and Twice, and if he no longer wanted it the essence of it was a crippled thing which would for ever be part of me, just as my crippled legs were part of me. I think that I have said that I am a simple sort of person

and in my mind I saw the position as simply and clearly as that; but life is not a matter of simple, straightforward decisions taken in one's own mind and followed through. No. The business of living is more complicated than that.

If you love anyone as I love Twice, the love begets a detailed and deep knowledge of the beloved, and this knowledge, in turn, engenders a deeper love. It becomes an infinite progression of love, knowledge, more love, more knowledge. I knew, at this time, a great deal of and about Twice, and one of the many things I knew was that he would never leave me until I told him to go. I knew that Monica could bring all her desire for him to bear, bring all her ruthlessness to her aid, but that all her efforts would go for nothing against the hard core of the strange integrity that was at the centre of the character of Twice. He had loved the woman I had been, and if a combination of events – Monica's coming and my accident – had caused a shift of emotion as an earthquake will cause a shift in the ocean bed, that did not mean that Twice would drift with the newly formed current. Twice was violent and passionate in everything he thought and did, and no doubt his feeling for Monica was violent and passionate like all his feelings, but I knew that, always, his greatest violence, passion and force were retained for the maintenance of his own moral standards. It would be a violation of these standards, I knew, to do anything that would mortally hurt *me*, for he was aware that all that was deepest and most valuable in me was vested in my faith in him. I did not have, in Sybil's words, to have things 'put right' for me. Twice would never put them wrong.

What is so difficult to believe now, after many years, is that a set of circumstances had arisen which had convinced me that I did not want Twice to stay with me. And this brings me back to my way of loving. A love like mine has no desires except the happiness and welfare of the beloved. Compared with the unhappiness that I felt in Twice at this time, all my own ugly, torturing suspicions, all my self-pity, all my feeling of betrayal by Monica, all my sense of cruel loss were nothing. If only Twice were brought out of this deep, wordless unhappiness of his and back to happiness, nothing else would matter.

Life, as usual, did not stand still throughout the long cold days and nights when I spent so much time alone, trying to

beat out some solution to my small but torturing problem. The Christmas parties came and went, I went on daily with my 'walking practice' with my crutches - horrid, cacophonous word for these horrid unsightly instruments. Old Mattha's son, who had chosen to take a trip home from America, turned out to be a wealthy dyspeptic widower of about fifty and Loose and Daze were hot on his trail, competing hard to be a comfort to him, to the grim amusement of Mattha and earning his acid comment. Matthew, called after his father but known as Matt for differentiation, seemed to be utterly at the mercy of Loose and Daze, who controlled his life and his diet, commandeered him and his hired car for trips to Glasgow and Edinburgh, and knitted him mufflers and socks against the rigours of the Scottish winter. Matt came to be known as 'The Mat', for, indeed, very much like the proverbial doormat did the ladies pull and shake him between them and jointly tread him down.

Old Mattha continued to take a personal interest in Crookmill, and, in spite of the protests of Loose and Daze, I encouraged him, for his cynical, disillusioned attitude to most of life suited my mood at this time. On Saturdays he would arrive with a commandeered labourer, horse and cart and two commandeered grandsons who were forced to cut logs for the Crookmill fires, whether they would or no, and Mattha would bring a kitchen chair, which was the most comfortable seat for his rheumatism, alongside my bed or wheelchair and give me the benefit of his views on anything and everything. I think it was the fact that I was a cripple that caused Mattha's unusual attitude towards me, as if my being unable to walk rendered me sexless, and at the same time added years to my age to make me a contemporary of his own. At all events, he would talk to me as he did no other woman, and even gave an impression of respecting my opinions, a compliment he paid to few men and to no other woman to my knowledge.

"An' hoo muckle longer is that reid-heidit bizzom gaun tae be stoppin' here?" he asked me suddenly one morning before Monica was quite out of earshot.

"Lady Monica?"

"Leddy Monica, if ye like," he said sourly. "Leddy or no, she's a bizzom like a' the rest an' a reid-heidit yin at that. An' never could abide reid hair - hot-tempered they are, they."

there's mair nor that. Aye. They're hot in ither places forbye their tempers, the bitches."

"Now, Mattha, that will do. I have known Lady Monica for a long time and she is a good friend of mine."

"Freen's!" said Mattha with scorn. "The bother wi' you is ye huv faur ower mōny freen's as ye ca' them! Folk fur iver skitterin' aboot yer place as if it wis a bliddy hotel! Ah'd gie them their orders if it wis ony o' *ma* business! Freen's! Weel, dinnae say Ah didnae tell ye!"

"Tell me what?"

"Ach, ye ken fine! It's a bliddy shame, that's whit it is! . . . Hoo's yer legs?"

"Fine. I'll surprise you all one of these days."

I was glad when he went away that day. So far, the tangle between Monica, Twice and me had been a thing private to ourselves, for one could discount the secret world of the Loames and Sybil's knowledge, but old Mattha was the writing on the wall of the Ballydendran world. Although Daze called him 'that ill-natured old craitur' and Loose called him 'that nasty spitting old man', he was a realist with unblinded sight and by far the most observant person who came to Crookmill. He had spent years in the observation of humanity, with special reference, it is true, to its foibles, follies and failings, and was qualified, therefore, to be the first of our surrounding world to see what was happening, but after him would come the deluge, with all the indignity of small-town gossip, comment and speculation.

Grimly I went on with my walking practice, for I now had matters reduced in my mind to the utmost simplicity. The only thing to do, I had decided, was to walk out; it seemed to be the only solution that would leave any of us with a shred of dignity – such a simple thing to do, provided one can *walk*. Everything turned on that, that once again I should be master of my own movement, no longer an object for help or pity, but someone with the power to make a decision for herself and act upon it, by walking away, unaided, into the future. This future, this what-might-come-after, did not matter to me and I did not think of it. I thought of nothing, almost, but the desperate need to walk, and despair brings with it its own strength and its own courage, and also, I found, its own secretive pride. I did not tell anyone how proficient I was becoming at my walking, because you sec, it was

all I had at that time that was my own and so much had been taken away from me that I guarded my walking with secrecy in case, somehow, that should be taken away from me too.

One afternoon, towards the end of February, while everyone was out, I walked to and fro along the back passage of Crookmill six times, turning at the ends, without even once my courage failing me, so that I had to put out a hand for the support of Mattha's wall, and the next day I did it ten times, but now I had reached the stage when the number of times did not matter to me, for I was no longer clinging to the safety of Mattha's wall. The terrible fear of falling had gone. Suddenly I found in myself the knowledge that I could walk out of the house, down the rough road and away along the main tarmacadam highway at the foot of our hill. I was no longer afraid that I should fall. At last, at last, I could really walk.

I went back to my wheelchair and sat down to enjoy my jubilation, to triumph about my conquest of the fear of falling that had been the worst and most persistent aspect of my convalescence, to wallow in my regained courage, only to find that I had no courage at all. Now that I was physically able to walk out and away from Twice I did not have the mental courage to do it. Not yet. I must wait a little, keeping my walking a secret. I must wait until this new kind of courage that I needed came to me.

It was shortly after this that, one evening, Twice came home in the mood which always made my love a deep ache of tenderness. His tie was crooked, he had a smudge of black oil on his face, he was irritable with himself and with all the world, he was whistling 'Scotland the Brave' as he always did, without knowing it, when things were going against him. There was no conversation, still, but one had to say something. One always has to say something.

"I thought you were supposed to be a white-collar type nowadays?" I greeted him. "How did you get your face into the oil?"

He threw his coat at the sofa and began to undo his tie as he came across the room towards my wheelchair.

"Will you kiss me in spite of it or must I bath first?"

"Come and I'll tell you." I kissed him on the oil patch.

"There. What's wrong?"

"Oh, everything. That new lay-out they've put in is all to

hell and gone. It just won't *do*. I told that production bloke it wouldn't, but, oh no, they had to try it. Well, they've tried it now!"

"And?"

"They're going to pull it all out and put it in *my* way now. Waste of time, the whole bloody issue. . . . Can I have some tea?"

"Not a drink?"

"No. Tea. . . . Daze! Some tea, please!"

"You are in a real fan-tod, my pet," I said. Twice always calls for tea at peculiar times when he is worried or discontented. "Look, would it help to sit down and have a cuss about it?"

"I'm tired of cussing," he said, but he sat down and began to roll his shirtsleeves up over his powerful forearms. "I'm fed up, that's all. Fed up to the back teeth!"

I felt cold inside. "With anything in particular?"

"With everything." He clenched his fists between his knees and sat looking down at them. "This Managing Directing job is a poultice, to start with. I'm not an office-wallah! I mean, I don't mind writing a few letters and attending a few meetings and so on, but dammit, it makes me mad when they resent me walking through the assembly shop. Hell, I'm an engineer! I'm not a civil servant or an office boy or something! If I'd wanted to sit behind a desk and push a pen all day I'd never have learned to use a lathe or a micrometer. Dammit, if I'd wanted to choke myself on a diet of paper, I'd have taken to the law or gone into a bank! . . . And, talking of paper, when the hell is Monica going to get out of those rooms through there?"

In these moods, his brain often flew off at tangents, but this time the fly-off was a little sudden and in an odd direction.

"Paper? Monica?" I said.

"I always intended to have myself a little drawing-office in that end room through there. You *know* that!" he snapped crossly. He was partly right. It was something I *had* known about but had forgotten with all the other things I was trying to forget, this drawing-office of his. Daze came in with his tea tray and he almost chased her out of the room.

"I wish to God Monica'd clear out," he said moodily, poking spitefully at the sugar with a spoon.

I felt lost and bewildered. As I have said before, I am

slow-witted and easily muddled and, in addition, I was now wandering in strange country, for Twice had not mentioned Monica to me for months.

"But, Twice, I thought you liked Monica!" I said stupidly.

"Oh, don't pretend to be Loose-an'-Daze and muddle-headed, Flash!" he snapped impatiently. "It's nothing to do with liking or not liking Monica! I want a *drawing-office*, *here*, in the *house*, at *Crookmill*!"

"I see."

"You don't see at all! When you say 'I see' like that, it means 'I wish to God everybody would shut up and go away so that I can think this thing out' . . . Great God! You would think I didn't *know* you!"

"Stop bawling!" I shouted back at him. "All *right*, I don't see! Why this sudden desperate urge to have a drawing-office through there? You have the latest model drawing-table in your office at the works and all sorts of fancy lighting – isn't that enough?"

"Monica isn't even company for *you* now! She hardly ever comes in here. And it isn't a sudden urge to have a drawing-office through there! I've *always* wanted it! The works! I haven't got *you* at the works! . . . Flash, you and I could have fun through there – I hate these evenings when I have to go back to the works to draw because the evening is the only time I get peace to do that sort of thing!"

"Twice Alexander, do I understand you to be making oblique love to me?" I asked in a silly, joking way, in order to cover the tremulous uncertainty that I felt shaking me.

"If you like it oblique – certainly. I'll make any kind of love to you at any time you choose. I'll do anything in *my* power for you. I thought you knew that. I love you, *you* see," he paused. "I thought you knew that," he repeated.

I did not speak and he went on: "But I have felt for a little while that you weren't in much of a mood for any kind of lovemaking." He was not looking at me, but down into his teacup. Twice has very heavy-lidded eyes and the eyes themselves are very brilliant, so that when the lids come down to cover them his whole face takes on a curious, closed blankness. His mind is always at its most alert and penetrating when his face looks like that. It is very disconcerting.

"This – this dreadful thing that happened to something that no one else can know about –

Now that you are getting better, you may be finding that you are a different person from — well, from the person that loved *me*. That is what worries me so much. I don't know if you even want to talk about it." He looked up at me questioningly, a quick flash of blue light.

"Talk, Twice," I said.

He breathed out a sighing breath, rose and took a pipe from the rack on the mantelpiece. "This thing that happened has changed both of us." He was concentrating hard on the pipe and the tobacco. I held my breath painfully. Here it was. I thought some miracle had happened, but no. The dreaded moment was on me after all. I sat still and looked straight ahead of me at the Animated Bust on the corner of the bookshelf. "What happened was what I would have said was impossible," he said. "A year ago I would have said it was utterly impossible. But that accident has been like a wedge driven between us — I did not think that such a thing could happen. I did not think, a year ago, that any experience could come to either of us that the other could not share. I have tried my best, Flash. I have tried to feel as you felt, to think as you have thought. If I could have done all the suffering for you I would have done it, but I couldn't. All I could do was my own thinking and feeling and suffering and know all the time that you and I were drifting into two separate worlds. And the loneliness is the worst thing. It is getting worse, the blank, lifeless loneliness."

"Loneliness?"

"Yes, my separate world is full of it and it is coming over me like — like a darkness, and soon I shall lose touch with you altogether, and then, I know, I myself will be lost." He put the unlit pipe back in the rack, turned his back to me and began to walk away down the room. "If this dreadful thing that happened to you, Flash, has made you so that you don't want me, we can arrange things somehow. I will know that it isn't your fault and that you are not deliberately being cruel to me. I know that you would not hurt me if you could help it. But if this thing has killed in you what was between us, as the baby was killed, tell me. That would be kinder than just going on like this from day to day. But, Flash, if you *can* come back out of that separate place you have gone away to, will you try to come? If it is difficult, let me try to help, but I wish, Flash, that you could come back!"

The length of the large room was between us and I was blind with tears of shame and sorrow, but I rose from the wheelchair.

"Twice," I said, "I am coming back."

He turned and stared, his hands held out, but his feet rooted to the floor by his fear to move, as I walked the length of the room towards him.

"You see what I mean by separate worlds?" he said later, when he could speak coherently. "I would never have believed that you could practice your walking in secret like that and never tell me of your progress. It was a cruel thing to do, Flash! What made you do it?"

"I don't know," I told him. "It was a thing I had in my mind. I wanted it to be a secret until I could walk well enough to – to walk right up to you."

I have told in some detail of these mental reactions to my state of physical paralysis, but this does not mean that I feel that these reactions were in any way unique. I think that the balance between the mental and the physical in any human being is of extreme delicacy and that the mental and physical are linked more closely than the physiologists on the one hand and the psychologists on the other would lead us to believe in their approach to the ills that affect mankind. To be in the physical situation of having apparently healthy legs that will not move is in its essence macabre and I do not find it extraordinary that a mind encased in a body in such a situation should tend towards the macabre in the thoughts and ideas it generates. At all events, during the time that I was tied to my surgical bed, I generated for myself a fine set of what my friend Tom would call 'MacAbers'.

Tom pronounced the word 'macabre' as if it were the name of an old Highland crony of his and, indeed, it has something of this meaning in his mind. His acquaintance with the word came from the title of a book we have at home which is *Tales Grim and Macabre* and which is a collection of ghost stories and other queernesses, mostly by Le Fanu. Tom, after reading the book several times, persists in his belief that 'macabre' is another word for 'ghost' and gives the whole thing a tang of his own countryside by referring to ghosts, invariably, as 'MacAbers' – and quite a clan of them there is, too, up there in Ross-shire.

And so after my long sojourn among the MacAbers

emerged into a world that seemed to be entirely refurbished. It was the same world, with the same people in it, that I had known before my accident, but it was like an old house and garden, long known, that had been redecorated and refurnished, relandscaped and replanted. It all lay before me to be rediscovered and I had all the time in the world to go about in it, savouring in leisure and with pleasure all its freshness and old memories.

PART FOUR

WHEN ONE is completely happy it is very easy, I find, to lapse into the attitude of: "Pull up the ladder! I'm on board!"

In the midst of my own newfound happiness and security I was still aware that Monica was far from happy, but, with utter selfishness, I did not want to think of unhappiness and I pushed the thought of Monica aside. This was very easy to do, for she was away a good deal although she was still the tenant of the Ben-the-Hoose, and it was made easier still by the fact that, being able to walk again, I found myself extremely busy. Every day, I discovered some new place that I must walk to and walk back from – an old elm tree three fields away, a certain gate that broke the hedge that bordered the main road and – great adventure – the little waterfall in the burn, quarter of a mile up the hill behind the house. Dram and I were so busy walking – and we could run a little now, too, in a flat field where nobody could see us – that we had no time to think of anything else. And at weekends, when Twice was at home in daylight, we all three of us would go walking, which was pure bliss. Time flowed past me, with the flotsam of the small events of day by day, but I was so full of happiness that I noticed events only vaguely, like strangers passing by on the other side of a golden trellis.

By the end of March Loose and Daze had The Mat worn practically to a shred with all their attentions to him, and the rest of us were beginning to wonder if he would get away at the end of the month back to California without finding himself imprisoned for bigamy, when one evening he arrived at Crookmill, looking as wondering as ever, accompanied by his father, old Mattha, who was as sardonic as usual.

"He's go a tellygram," said Mattha, who invariably behaved as if his successful son were not only half witted but stricken with dumbness into the bargain. "He's no' tae gae back tae Amerikky the noo. His boss is comin' ower here an' he's tae wait here fur him an' gae back wi' him la'er on."

"Isn't that nice?" said Loose delightedly.

"Isn't that grand?" said Daze delightedly.

"Iphm," said Mattha and spat out through the kitchen window. "Ah thoct yees wid be pleased. That's the wey we cam' rinnin' richt doon tae tell yees." And he leered at them with hideous sarcasm.

"Really!" said Loose indignantly.

"Well!" said Daze indignantly.

"Reely! We-ell!" mocked Mattha and spat again through the window.

"Stop that!" said Loose and Daze in one voice.

"Whit?"

"Spitting like that!" said Loose.

"Through the window!" said Daze.

"Ah wish a' the folk Ah ken didnae dae ony waur nor spit!" said Mattha and marched off into the garden.

Throughout this scene Matthew had stood blinking through his spectacles with that look he always wore of wonder at this world in which he found himself – as well he might – and showed neither embarrassment at his father's behaviour nor indignation at his treatment by Loose and Daze, nor did he seem to share my amusement at the exchange between the three.

"You know, Matthew," I said, "I don't think I even know what your job is?"

"Fruit farming," said Daze.

"Fruit canning," said Loose.

I wished that just for once someone would allow Matthew to speak for himself and I looked at him and tried to convey as much in a glance.

"I am what the English call a market gardener," he said. "The Americans call it truck gardening, but here in Scotland, where we say what we mean – when we get the chance to speak – I am what they would call a fruit and vegetable grower."

I took what, in south Scotland, they call 'a second look' at Matthew, met his twinkling eyes behind his rimless glasses and discovered that he was not at all 'The Mat' of our imagination, but a genuine, if more polished, chip off the old granite block that was Mattha, and I knew that once again Loose and Daze were wasting their hunting time.

"Of course," he continued, "since I ply my trade in a big country I do it on a biggish scale. I manage six fruit and

well because of people like Mrs Slater and Mrs Webb who don't really drink'; and then it was decided to extend it over supper because 'poor Matthew won't get back from Glasgow until about seven and won't have any party at all'. Fortunately the day fell on a Saturday, except that that was almost a misfortune too, for Twice said: "Why not invite the whole boiling lot for the weekend and have done with it?" and I thought for a moment that Loose and Daze were going to take him seriously. Monica was away, which in one way was a relief to me; yet in another way it made a little grey smudge on my bright happiness and I said as much privately to Twice when we were alone one evening.

"Oh, well, it can't be helped," he replied banally.

He never spoke of Monica now except in a distant way and with a strong air of constraint. I did not like it, not only because I disliked that attitude to Monica when once she and Twice had been such good friends, but because it was the only constraint that lay between Twice and me. More and more I was coming to think that my sick imaginings and the mischievous machinations of old Mattha's sour mind had spoiled and tainted their friendship, and the thought was worrying me, but I had not the courage to say outright to Twice: 'I thought you were in love with Monica once'. Not even as a joke could I say it, for I knew that to tell him that I had ever thought such a thing would hurt him deeply.

"I wish she were here for my birthday, though," I said.

"Don't start to *harp*!" he told me, grinning. "Kate told me that when you were small you could harp on about things you wanted or wanted to know until you drove the household half crazy. Monica isn't here and that's that. No good your starting that I wish-t business."

"Yes - I always pronounced wish with a 't' at the end. . . . I *wisht* I had a pencil that would write red!"

"That's it - that's just what Kate told me."

"Anyway, it works. So I *wisht* Monica was here." Twice was silent. "You don't?" I asked.

"I *wisht* I had a drawing-office. I also *wisht* the whole situation was cleared up."

"What situation?"

"Monica in general. She is running about hither and yon like a hen with its head cut off."

"I think she is unhappy about something, Twice," I ventured.

"I can't help *that*," said Twice, "and I still wisht I had a drawing-office. Can I give you another small dram?"

"Ouf!" said Dram sleepily in his deep voice from his place on the floor.

"Not you, you oaf!" said Twice and drowned the subject of Monica in the gurgle of whisky into the glasses.

I gave a lot of thought to that 'I can't help *that*' with its emphasis on the first word and the last. Knowing Twice as I did, it was a tacit acknowledgement of his awareness that all was not well with Monica, and at the same time it was a disclaimer of all responsibility to try to help her. Six months ago Twice would not have taken that attitude to Monica, and there was no other person of our merest acquaintance to whom I could imagine him taking such an attitude. Monica must have done something that had angered him very much in order to cause it and I could not imagine how or when, for they never quarrelled, and when they were together at Crookmill they still maintained, most of the time, the sparing, good-natured fellowship they had had from the time of their first meeting. Yet, was the attitude the same? No. Since the night my first muscle had moved, Monica's replies had often had a poisoned edge of bitterness that had not been there in the earlier days.

Childishly I continued silently to 'wisht' that Monica would arrive for my birthday, but the day came, the party got under way with the arrival of Mrs Webb at three in the afternoon, but Monica did not arrive. It is difficult to describe the disappointment I felt. What Twice calls my Celtic Twilit Conscience was working on *this thing*, which meant that I was feeling that all the 'bad things' I had thought about Monica, which were not true, were now avenging themselves upon me, so that Monica was not coming to – and did not even write a postcard about – my birthday, and it was all because I had 'betrayed my friends' and it was 'all my own fault' and it 'served me right' and I was conscience-stricken and miserable.

Of course, the thing about parties is that the thing that they are being given about has no ultimate bearing on the success or failure of the party. A party can get given to celebrate an engagement of marriage and the two 'engagees' can

be as miserable as sin in the course of it; but that fact has no ultimate bearing on the success or otherwise of the party. A party seems to depend for success on two people present having been in the same bad spot during the most recent war, or on two people present having been at another party in Chicago the night the host's mistress dotted him one with a champagne bottle, while for failure it depends on the drink running out or two lady guests arriving wearing identically the same hat except for the colour of the feather.

Neither of these two untoward things happened at my party, and it was great success in spite of the fact that I was missing Monica so badly. Several of the new staff of Slater-sub came to it, and also a director of the parent company, who, with his wife, happened to be spending the weekend with the Slaters. The couple were a Mr and Mrs Lester, and Twice brought them to me as soon as they arrived. When the usual pleasantries of introduction were over, Mrs Lester drifted away with the Slaters, but Mr Lester, who was a large man, manoeuvred himself between me and the rest of the room and said: "I have been very anxious to meet you, Mrs Alexander. I have heard a great deal about you."

Many people, I suppose, have the poise and *savoir-faire* to deal with this sort of remark, but as I can never think of anything to say except: "Thank you very much. Here I am," I smiled in a gormless sort of way and said nothing at all.

"A charming place you have here," he said next, looking round the room.

We chatted for a little while about the house and the garden, and houses and gardens in general, and then: "Are you fond of travel, Mrs Alexander? Like my wife? Or are you the stay-at-home sort, like Mrs Slater?"

I felt that the question was not idle and I replied as truthfully as I could: "I don't think I am definitely either sort, Mr Lester. I am not a very definite person at all. I simply enjoy most things that come my way, I think. Before the war I travelled a little on the Continent and enjoyed it. During the war I was confined in one place for several years while I was in Air Intelligence and I didn't find it unbearable. Since the war I have been mostly here at Ballydendran. I like this too."

"I heard of your long illness. A very trying business. You are really well now?"

"Oh yes, thank you. Perfectly. I am a matter of great pride to the doctors and people who looked after me - it is rather pleasant experience."

"The paralysis itself must have been far from pleasant."

"Oh, well, one soon forgets that." I was bored with the subject. "I understand that you are on the export side of the firm, Mr Lester? Does that mean that you and Mrs Lester travel a great deal?"

"It means that, roughly, we are at home for only three months or less in the year. Not that we *have* a home - only a service flat in London . . . But I wanted to know what you would think if we gave your husband a few overseas assignments?"

I looked at him. "I wouldn't have any opinion, Mr Lester. It would depend entirely on what Twice thought."

He laughed. "This is stalemate - *he* says it would depend on you . . . Alexander, come here a moment, my boy!" Twice came over to us and Mr Lester continued: "Your wife says it all depends on you."

Twice turned to me. "Mr Lester knows what I think about the job the firm is offering me, Flash, and I'll tell you about that later. But when he made the offer this afternoon I told him that I didn't get married in order to travel off to the ends of the earth and have to live on a diet of letters. But if you would travel with me, that would be different."

"Well," I said, "I got married on the 'Whither thou goest, I will go' principle, but I don't know if I would like not having a home, like Mrs Lester." I looked round the big room with its wrought-iron fire-basket and all the things we had made and all the things that people had given us. In that moment I was full of possessive love for the *Animated Film* even. I looked back at Twice, but it was Mr Lester who spoke.

"It would not be quite like that for you, *Mr Alexander*. As I visualize it at the moment, you wouldn't be out of the country for more than six months at a time. Most of the time would be considerably shorter, in fact."

"And then come back here?" I asked Twice.

later in the evening, when he told me all about his new job, his eyes glittering with enthusiasm, I said: "What a job you were to hesitate! The salary and expenses are fantastic!"

"It will be a fantastically expensive way of life too!" he minded me.

"Well, I'm thrilled to bits, anyhow, and so are you! And don't try to be blasé about it!"

"I can't be that. To be truthful, Flash, I was getting fed up to the back teeth with Slatersub. I am not constructed to be a little cog in a big machine. I'm like Mattha - I like to work tae ma ain haun'. I like a job that is all mine, that I can leave my trademark on, so that after I am dead people can say: 'Alexander, the fool, did that - bloody awful, isn't it?' or 'Alexander did that - he wasn't a bad craftsman in his day'. This job gives me that sort of chance. Wherever I plan a layout, that plan is mine and I have to stand or fall by it. It makes me sort of the modern version of the itinerent craftsman, you see?"

"I see." I smiled at him. "And I become the modern version of the camp-follower, with all expenses paid."

"Don't be deluded, my pet. You are going to have to work your passage. I haven't given you your proper birthday present yet - what about a portable typewriter?"

"Of course! Now you really *are* talking! I'm not really the camp-following type."

"As if one didn't know," said Twice.

He was pleased with his new job because it made, as he said, an 'itinerant craftsman' of him, but Mr Slater, who was the only other person who knew as yet of the appointment, looked as if at any moment he would burst with sheer pride, that out of all the men in the vast organization Twice had been chosen for this plum of a job. I was pretty proud myself, at that, but did not dare to air my pride to Twice who did not think of his new job in terms of promotion or personal advancement at all. Twice has much of the isolation of mind of the single-handed craftsman and does not think in terms of personal advancement. He sees only the job to be done, the machine to be constructed, the production layout to be planned, and is quite unhampered by any questions of personal profit or loss, or the jockeying for positions of power or prestige which are always a feature in some degree of any

"I'm not! I couldn't love you more than I did before, but I *admire* you more now."

"That's very civil of you, darling."

"And I never tell you often enough how much I love and admire you, so I thought I would tell you this morning."

"Thank ye kindly again. I love and admire you too."

"That's nice," he said in a satisfied voice. "Would you mind if I kissed you, just to seal the agreement?"

"Not at all."

"Whit a cairry-on an' it the Sabbath Day!" said the voice of old Mattha. "But folk's only young an' daft the yince . . . Ah cam' in becuz Ah thocht yees wid like tae ken that that yin ben there is roarin' an' greetin'."

"Who? Loose?" Twice asked.

"Whae else?"

"What's wrong with her?"

"Ah niver speired. Ah dinnae haud wi' her at the best o' times as ye weel ken an' specially no' when she's roarin' an' greetin'."

"Come on," I said to Twice and we went along the back passage. Loose was mopping her eyes and sniffing when we went into Monica's living-room.

"What's up, Loose?" Twice asked.

"It was the telephone!" sobbed Loose, staring at the inoffensive black instrument on the table.

"The telephone?"

"It was Lord Beechwood, all the way from London. Monica's missing."

"*Missing?*" I almost shouted. I wanted to shake Loose. "What the devil d'you mean?"

She began to cry again. "Well—"

Daze now came into the room with a lugubrious face, and at the sight of her Loose began really to bellow, so Daze began to cry too.

"Oh, God—" I began to bawl at them.

"Go easy!" said Twice. "What about a cup of tea?"

"Ah jist thocht that wid be the next caper," said Mattha, creaking through the doorway with a tray, a teapot, an odd assortment of cups and two bottles of beer. "Here ye are. But Ah'm no' fur yer tea — tea at a' times o' the day tans the stamach, that's whit it diz. Here, yous yins — fur the love

God tak' some tea an' redd up yer faces! Whit's that reid-lit wee bizzom at noo? Is she in the jile?"

That's not the way to go on, Mattha!" said Daze.

Gaol! Really!" said Loose.

Weel, whit are yees greetin' about?" *Whaur* is she?"

We don't know!" shouted Loose. "Nobody knows! Nobody has heard a word from her for seven weeks! They've gung up *everybody*, and the bankers say she hasn't cashed cheque for *eight* weeks and none of the shops where she has counts has seen her and none of her friends or anybody, and she's *missing*, and so is her car, and the family is gung call in SCOTLAND YARD!"

And at the end of this tirade Loose and Daze gave a loud howl in one voice and dissolved into a fresh flood of tears.

"Great God Almighty!" said Twice and went away back along the passage to our own part of the house.

Dumbly, and feeling very, very frightened, I followed him. When I reached our living-room he was standing staring out of the window, and in an automatic way I went to my desk and sat down. The unfinished letter lay there with a large blot in mid-sentence that had been made when the wash-basin table fell over. "Twice and Dram have just ~~broken~~ over a table so this is all for this week. Love from Janet" I wrote, and put the sheets into an envelope. I had just finished addressing it when Twice turned round.

"Flash—"

I looked straight into his eyes. "Yes?"

"Flash—Monica wouldn't have done anything—"

"It depends on what you mean by stupid—Monica has done some very odd things."

"Flash—there's something—I didn't want to tell you—ever—but—"

I stared at him. "Twice, what? What is it?"

"Flash, don't be angry. It wasn't my fault. At least, I don't think so. I couldn't help it—"

"You couldn't help what? What are you really about? What . . . Great Heaven! Don't stand there looking like Loose and Daze rolled into one! What is it, Twice?"

"I didn't want to talk about it—until you knew and then it seemed—"

"Knew what?"

"About Monica."

"What about Monica?"

"She wanted us to go away together."

"Wanted—? Away together?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"From—oh, a long time back."

"No," I said. "No, I didn't know. Twice, you had better tell me about this, hadn't you?"

"There's nothing to tell. That's all."

"Darling, it can't be *all*. Listen, I'm not angry as you call it, and I'm not hurt or *anything*, but if you could tell me a little more of what happened and what was said between you and so on, I might be able to think of what Monica may have done . . . She fell in love with you, I take it?"

"That's what she said."

He had gone round behind me so that I could not see his face, but his voice betrayed a dreadful pained embarrassment and shame.

"When was this?"

"Oh, away back—when she first came to live in the Ben-the-Hoose."

"And you?"

"I—I told her not to be a fool."

"I see. And then?"

"Then you got sick and she came at me again. She—"
He stammered a little and then fell silent.

"Go on, Twice. I know Monica. She said you were tied for life to a cripple who would never walk again—is that it?"

"That and more and over and over—"

"And you?"

"I—I—it is a shocking thing to have to say—I'd feel better, somehow, if—" He broke off and suddenly came round to stand in front of me. "I'd feel better and less ashamed—It was an unreal thing she had, a sort of delusion. I could feel it. . . . I'd feel less ashamed—"

"Less ashamed about what?" I asked as quietly as I could.

"I'd feel less ashamed if it had been a real thing and I had jumped into bed with her!" he burst out brutally. "But I couldn't! She was hysterical and revolting! What I did was—"

"Yes?"

"I turned her over my knee and smacked her bottom!"
he said, all in one breath and on a falling note.

"Twice!" In spite of everything and all my worry I began to laugh and could not stop.

"It isn't funny, really," he said shakily, staring at me.

"Sorry. I couldn't help it . . . Where did this smacking take place?"

"In a hotel room in Birmingham — *my* room. And she had nothing on but a pink satin thing. But I was so goddam mad at her for following me down there like that—"

"All right. I know how you must have felt, my pet. When did this happen?"

"That last time I went south — Monica hasn't shown up here since."

"What happened after you — smacked her?"

"She started to cry, and I was sorry for losing my temper and then—"

"She came back to the attack again?"

"Yes. So I called her everything I could think of, picked up my bag and walked out of the place."

"Everything you could think of? Can you remember any of the things you thought of?"

"Oh, trollop, harlot, nymphomaniac — I pretty well threw the book at her. And got very childish too, when I think of it. I told her she was too undignified to be human and that I'd as soon get into bed with a polecat and that I belonged to the world of *people*, not brute beasts and so on. I think that's about all. But do you wonder I didn't want to talk about it? Do you wonder I feel ashamed?"

"No, I don't. It was a shameful position to get yourself into."

"Get myself into? Listen, *I* didn't make the running! That's what's so humiliating! It's — it's AWFUL to be hounded round the country by someone who doesn't interest you in the least! Interest! I began to think there must be something wrong with me when I couldn't raise even a flicker of interest. Interest! I've never been so revolted in all my life!"

"I wish I had known about this sooner, Twice," I said.

"Why? Anyway, I thought you *did* suspect something, but I did not want to bring any of it into words between you and me. It isn't the sort of thing that belongs with you and me. And, anyway, what could you have done? It would only

have led to some sort of filthy scene. I know that you and I can have ourselves quite a hair-tearing when we feel like it, but ours is just usually good healthy bad temper. This thing of Monica's was unhealthy and revolting – it is difficult to talk about it now without feeling sick."

"That is just the point – that word unhealthy. There is something wrong with her, Twice. Where in the *world* can she be? It didn't occur to you to worry about her all this time – since Birmingham?"

He stared at me, frowning. "Well, no. The Birmingham thing was nothing special to me. Or to Monica, I thought. It was the first time I had laid hands on her, but otherwise it was just a bigger and better scene than the smaller ones we had had in dozens before. It never entered my head that she would disappear like this. I was delighted when she didn't turn up here again – thought I'd got her choked off at last."

"You used the word unhealthy, Twice. Did you mean it literally; I mean, did you get the impression that Monica was – well, sort of crazy?"

"Not literally. No. I mean – oh, Christ, how embarrassing all this is! Even to talk about to *you* which is like talking to myself . . . No, I meant more that, for me, *any* hole-and-corner affair like that, especially in our circumstances, with you ill and everything, was unhealthy and revolting . . . No. She was sane enough, if that's what you mean. Good heavens, only a person with a good brain in good working order could have handled those last days of the old Slater firm as she did . . . But, wait, there *was* something odd in the business, too. I always had the feeling that the hounding of me that she went in for was unreal – spurious. Sort of *contrived* – you know, unnatural. Words are difficult. I can't explain what I mean. But I used to say to myself that it couldn't be real, this business of a bloke like me being chased by a female scion of the nobility, you know? Then I would tell myself that she must have some sort of slumming complex and that maybe that was why she had picked on you for a friend as well as on me for a lover. . . . When I say slumming, like that, what I mean is, escape – out of her own world and into another. . . . But the queerest thing about it all was her attitude to *you*. I used, naturally, to drag your name in and her reaction always was: You leave Janet out of this! It is nothing to do with Janet! This is between you and me! . . .

it was always the attitude except when she was using
her illness as a lever, you know."

"It couldn't have been very amusing for you, all this
vice. It's no good saying that I'm sorry that I ever brought
her here - that doesn't help. But I *do* wish we knew where
she is now!"

"If her family, with all their resources, can't find her, we
can't," Twice said. "Flash, you won't tell anybody about all
this carry-on?"

"I can't see that telling about it would do any good," I told
him. "At this stage it would only be humiliating for every-
body."

"She has always been fairly highly sexed, hasn't she?"

"No. Not really," I said. "I wouldn't have said so. Men
always fell for her like ninepins - understandable, when you
think of her, isn't it?"

"Lord, yes. I give you that. I merely happened to be other-
wise engaged, as it were."

"She used to take it all in her stride. During the war,
especially in our unit where there weren't many women and
everyone was fairly confined, she and I were always having
the odd whirl with someone. Nothing very serious. And quite
often we would agree that we had more fun in one another's
company than we had with the boy friends. No. She wasn't
sexy in those days and she didn't lose her head. That's why
I feel that something's gone wrong with her. That business
with you is not the Monica I knew. I *wish* I knew where she
is!" I got up. "Still, it's no use sitting here wishing. I suppose
Loose and Daze are still through there bawling. I'll have to
make them understand to keep their big mouths shut in
Ballydendran, at least for the moment."

"I agree," Twice said. "No use in having a local wonder
if it can be avoided."

To comfort people like Loose and Daze is not difficult.
Their minds are strangely childlike, and in a fatalistic way
they expect to fall down and graze their knees occasionally;
they expect things to go a little wrong for them, but for
them, as for most children, there is always some 'bigger' per-
son around who has to do the comforting and all the real
worrying that has to be done. To put a rein on their tongues
is a more difficult matter, so when the crying had stopped I
became extremely serious and stern with them and ~~implied~~

that if one whisper of the mystery of Monica leaked out in Ballydendran they would both leave Crookmill forthwith and: "You know how Ballydendran would gossip about *that!*" I ended darkly. When they had sworn that they would be trampled by a herd of elephants before they said a word, I returned to my own end of the house, unjustly cross with them both for the very weak ineffectiveness that made them so nice and harmless. Monica, I thought, was at least effective.

"Listen," Twice greeted me, "I've had an idea. Don't accuse me of having sex on the brain, but isn't it possible that Monica, having drawn a blank with me, has gone off somewhere with one of the many boy friends?"

"It's possible, I suppose." I took thought for a moment. "In fact, it's highly probable, I suppose, if one can believe what one reads about women and sex generally. But I have an odd feeling about this. I don't somehow *see* Monica in — in—"

"Loitering in the fields of dalliance somewhere?"

I laughed. I had to.

"What's so comical?" Twice asked.

"Nothing really. It was just odd that you should bring out that particular expression at this moment."

"Why?"

"Oh, the usual thing," and I went on to tell him about Monica and me and the fields of dalliance. To tell him of this, to reconstruct a little of Monica's and my past, was comforting to me in this situation of nagging worry about her.

From the earliest day that I can remember, my home and my family were dominated by my grandmother, a tall, fine-looking, eagle-eyed old woman — in fact, a typical Highland crofter's wife, but not at all like these bonneted and shawled old crones that you see sitting at firesides in Victorian prints having the Bible read to them by Queen Victoria. Indeed, I would like to have seen Queen Victoria — or anyone else — calling unexpectedly on my grandmother in order to read the Bible to her on a day when she was getting the butter ready for market. That would have made a picture worth printing. From morning till night, the house, yard and steading rang with her commands.

"Are you men going to sit there all day smoking your pipes? That won't get the hay in!"

"Janet, take the little pitcher and get me some spring water for the butter. And don't spend all the morning staring about you! Go straight to the spring now and don't dally!"

"Kate, get that table cleared and bake a few scones - here's hardly a morsel of food in the house!"

"Janet, take this jar of jam east to old Granny Fraser - she's very fond of rhubarb jam, the poor old craitur. And be back by teatime and don't dally!"

"Janet, go out and get some tatties for the hens' pot and quick now and don't dally!"

"Janet - don't dally!"

And in moments of utter exasperation she would add: "That Janet! She is just my old Uncle Rory all over again, the idle wastrel!"

These last words in my mind were one word which was spelled: 'Idolwastrel' and in my mind the idolwastrel was a fat, benign, brown creature with a paunch who sat all the time, cross-legged and dallying, on a nice stretch of moorland like the three miles between our house and old Granny Fraser's. Sir Torquil Daviot, the local baronet, whose study I had once visited with my grandfather to discuss a matter of some march fencing, had a small bronze Buddha which, when I asked what it was, I was told was an 'idol' and I think this is why my familiar, the idolwastrel, had this form in my mind. I was very fond of my idolwastrel, who accompanied me everywhere I went for a long time, although I knew it was a sin to have this 'thought person' and I knew that it was even more of a sin that I should feel so much in sympathy with him, for, of course, my grandmother knew everything and was right about everything and everybody had to do what she said, and my grandmother would tell you that idols were 'sins of ignorance', but that dallying and waste of time and waste of any kind were far bigger sins because you 'ought to know better'.

Then, to make matters still more sinful, I read the phrase 'the fields of dalliance' somewhere and realized at once that these fields, and not the moor between our house and Granny Fraser's, were the true home of the idolwastrel and myself. The fields of dalliance were green water meadows -

something I had never seen but which sounded cool and beautiful – ‘with daisies pied’ and strewn with asphodel, eglantine, daffydowndillies and all the plants of poetry which, by mindsight, were far more beautiful than any of the real flowers that I knew by eyesight and by local name, and the idolwastrel and I dallied together endlessly in these fields, the idolwastrel, in the extraordinary way of childhood, contriving to dally without ever uncoiling himself from his crosslegged, sitting position, although to reach the fields of dalliance at all you had to travel away, away to a far, far country and, in hard fact, often found yourself wandering away up over the Greycairn moor instead of coming ‘straight’ home from old Granny Fraser’s by teatime.

When I had told Monica of these fields of dalliance she had said: “How very strange! I have never thought of them as being in the open air at all – and certainly they weren’t water meadows. I have always known they were fields ‘d’alliance’ – places where people get together, you know, like ballrooms and double beds!” I think that this goes to show in some degree the difference that background can make to people. My grandmother probably never had cause to use the word ‘alliance’ either in English or in French, but ‘dally’ was a word that she used as frequently as any in her vocabulary. Monica, from her earliest days, probably heard the word ‘alliance’ being bandied about all the time but had never heard the word ‘dally’, being, as my grandmother would have told you, had she known Monica, of a family that had nothing to do but dally all day and for ever if it wanted to.

But now the only effect that my leit-motif about the fields of dalliance had on Twice was to make him say: “There you are! Double beds! The old sex thing again! I tell you, that damned woman is rolling in the hay somewhere, with *somebody*!”

I immediately felt angry with Twice, and in some queer way that I could not explain this certainty of his that crept into every discussion of the subject that now dominated our lives invariably hurt and exasperated me to the point of ill-temper. The days rolled past and we all lived in a network of telephone calls which got nobody anywhere, except to fray the nerves of Twice and myself with our ugly knowledge of the prelude to the disappearance. Twice was extremely bad-

tempered about the whole thing too, but for reasons different from mine.

"Drat her! You can say what you like, Flash, but this is no way to behave. Would *you* do this to your people?"

My weekly letter to my home, written every Sunday, was almost part of my religion, as was my father's letter to me, also written on Sunday, part of his.

"That's different," I said. "And Monica's people are not as worried about her as mine would be about me. I once said that the Loames had a world of their own, but actually ~~Loame~~ Loame has a world. Her people are more annoyed than worried – annoyed because she hasn't turned up for this meeting about the Derbyshire estate and they can't get on with the business until they get her signature. Their relationships to one another are different from ours – I realized that when Sybil was here."

"Sybil's stab at *The Times* Agony Column was no good, either?"

"Apparently not."

"Flash, I hope to God she is all right. She was drinking like a fish for a bit."

"You can't drink for free and she has never cashed a cheque—"

"Unless she has another bank account they don't know about—"

"Twice, I wish you'd stop worrying and worrying at this like a dog with a bone! It doesn't do any good!"

"It wasn't *you* that smacked her behind! I feel like a monster!"

"Oh, shut up! What I ought to do is smack *both* your behinds!"

I was now feeling cross at Monica as well as worried about her, for now, by her very absence, she was dominating the atmosphere of Crookmill, and, what was utterly exasperating, she was putting me in an uncomfortable position with all its inhabitants. I find that I can be talkative and garrulous to an amazing degree about anything unimportant, but in critical situations I find no release of outlet in mere words, and the people around me were beginning to accuse me of harshness, lack of sympathy, lack of proper feeling by word, look and gesture. Old Mattha was a perfect pest.

"Nae word o' that wee bizzom yet?"

"No."

"Ah bet ye she's droont at the bo'om o' some river wi' that damt caur. She aye drove it as if the divil wis on her tail. It's no' a year ago that a man wi' a caur went ower the side o' the Divil's Beefstub an' naebody kent for a fortnicht, wi' the snaw an' a'."

"There is no snow just now, Mattha."

"A caur could stot aff the road a' the same! She aye drove it as if the divil wis—"

"Oh, shut up, Mattha! Everybody is worried enough without you beefing around the place!"

"Gettin' crabbit'll no' help ye! Nor the poor wee lassie aither!"

"Poor wee lassie! I thought you didn't like her, anyway?"

"That wis diff'runt. . . .Och weel, if ye dinnae care, ye dinnae care. . . . Matt's boss fae Amerikky an' his sister are comin' doon here the-day."

"Oh? They've arrived, then?"

"Aye, on Setterday. They're gaun tae stop here fur a week. Matt's got rooms at the Shepherd's Crook fur them." He gave a malevolent chuckle. "Ah said tae pit them up in oor garret, but Matt said oor plumbin' wisnae gidd enough. An' us wi' a bath an' an inside closet an' a'! Plumbin'! . . . Ye ken that man Morrison up the Toon?"

"The plumber?"

"Plumber? He couldnae wipe a j'int tae save his life! Niver feenished learnin' his tredd." He snorted. "He's pit a new board ootside his hoose. Ye ken whit it says on it?"

"No. What?"

"Sanitary Engineer! Did ye ever hear tell o' the like o' that? It seems there's nae plumbers nooadays. They're a'—whit's yon word your man disnae like?"

"Technologist?"

"Aye. They're a' technologists. In ma day there wisnae ony technologists." He spat into the cabbage patch. "An' Ah'll tell ye anither thing there wisnae in they days."

"What?"

"This thing that the bolshie bastard doon at the railway ca's proletariats. We wis a' in the bar o' the Royal the ither nicht an' he says we wis a' proletariats, No' me, Ah says. Oh, but ye are, says he. Whit wey? says Ah. Because ye *are*, says he. Awa' tae hell, says Ah, Ah'm no' a proletariat an' niver

wis', Ah says, an' wan mair funny word oot o' yer heid, Ah says, an' Ah'll warm yer lugs fur ye, ma lad."

"And what happened then?" I asked. I could listen for hours to Mattha's views and experiences, especially now, to get away from the eternal subject of Monica. Mattha spat into the cabbages again. "Ach, his wife cam' in an' gi'ed him a cursin' an' took him awa' hame. Pare sowl! If Ah wis mairrit tae a wuman like yon, Ah'd likely be a proletariat masel'."

When, later, I told Twice that Mattha had the idea that a proletariat was a henpecked husband, Twice pointed out that Mattha might be right at that if one defined 'proletariat' as many people did as a 'downtrodden mass'.

Matthew did not let any grass grow under his feet, but brought his 'boss' and the sister to see us that very evening, and once again I discovered that I had fallen into the trap that catches me so frequently. I always preconceive ideas of people, and almost without fail I am, as Monica would say, 'quite wrong'. Because Matthew was a man of about fifty, I had made up my mind that his 'boss' would be a man of at least sixty, and I had mentally supplied him with spectacles and a slight paunch as worn by Matthew himself. I was therefore rendered speechless while I rearranged my ideas when Matthew presented a very tall, rangy, loose-limbed, fair man of about thirty, who had an engaging smile and a very small, turned-up nose, while the elderly maiden sister that I had been expecting turned out to be a miniature creature of about five feet tall, about twenty years old, with a crop of fair curls, a wide curly smile and a nose even smaller and more turned-up than her brother's.

"I'm Jim Garvin, Mrs Alexander," the young man said, "and this is my sister Martha. We're certainly pleased to meet Matt's friends."

I looked at Martha's hand, engulfed in the broad hand of Twice, and thought that I had never seen anything so unlike a 'Martha' in my life. She was so small in stature that she had to look upwards at everyone, which gave her face a childlike innocence which was merely intensified by her sparkingly mischievous smile and I could see that clumsy protectiveness that large men can generate already beginning to ooze out of Twice. I was conscious of a similar feeling in myself towards Martha.

"And is this your first visit to Scotland?" I asked her. "It is," her brother replied for her. "She never wanted to come to Europe before, but now she's gotten herself a Scotch boy friend and that alters everything."

"Oh? And where in Scotland was he born?" I asked.

"He was born in Boston, Massachusetts," said Martha, "but that only makes Scotchmen Scotcher. His name is Ian Macdonald."

"That's the Article!" said old Mattha, pushing glasses of whisky into our hands. "Another danged Heilan'man!" and he went back to Twice at the sideboard, pouring the drinks.

"Say, that old character, Matt's father, just kills me!" Jim Garvin said. "I can hardly understand a word he says!"

"Just as well," I told him. "His language is just about the bottom half the time. . . . And is the boy friend over here now too?"

"Not yet he isn't, but he hopes to get over in the fall and go back with us," said Martha. "I hope to get me a kilt before he gets here."

"The kilt wouldn't suit you," I said firmly. "You must have a tartan skirt and a good sweater, though."

"Aw, gee, I'd have liked a kilt!"

"Your Ian would prefer a skirt, I feel quite sure," I said.

"Why?"

"Well, it's difficult to explain—"

"You mean — it's a 'just because'?"

I smiled down at her with delight. "That's exactly what it is — it's a 'just because'!"

She wrinkled her nose, smiling back at me. "It was Ian that told me about 'just because's'. They have far more of them in Boston than we have out west, but he told me that there were *hundreds* over here. He says that 'just because's' — quote — are the hallmark of a true civilization."

"Your Ian sounds like a very wise young man."

"He's quite cute, too," said Martha, sipping her drink thoughtfully.

I found her entrancing and did not want the party to break up, for she seemed to have brought with her out of the distant west of America some of the golden light of her own country. Playing this radiance over the people in the room, he caused me to see in them things I had never seen before, and she even gave new outlines to the familiar furnishings.

"Flash," said Twice, coming over to us with Jim, "Jim and Martha are determined to drive up to John o' Groats."

"You bet!" said Martha. "I want to see *all* of it!"

"And I've been telling Jim not to miss Reachfar."

"Reachfar?" Martha inquired. "Say, that's a cute name! What is it?"

"The name of my home," I said. "Certainly, you must go there - it's only a few miles off the main north road."

"Reachfar," she repeated. "That's just about the cutest name for a place that I ever heard. Who thought of it?"

"Oh, lord!" I began to laugh. "Nobody knows. We spell it as we pronounce it, as if it were English, but I think it is probably a corruption of some Gaelic name."

"Would you mind if I was to borrow it?"

"Borrow it?"

"For the cottage Ian and I are going to have up at Cape Cod? We want a name that's good and remote—"

"It's remote, all right," Twice said.

"I am sure my father would be delighted to think that there was a Reachfar at Cape Cod," I told her.

In the end Jim and Martha Garvin stayed for three weeks at the local hotel and that was long enough for My Friend Martha to come into being, but by the end of the second week of their stay there was still no hint or hair of My Friend Monica, and we were all getting more cross with one another as we became more worried and day followed day. Her family also was getting beyond the discreet inquiry stage now and beginning to consider a general hue and cry, with all the attendant publicity that would ensue. The most that we knew was that she must be somewhere in Scotland, England or Wales and that her car was probably with her, for her passport was at the London house and the car could not be traced in any garage.

I prayed to see a telegraph boy cycling up the road to Crookmill, but day after day the only emissary of the post office was the red van with the letters. One evening Lord Beechwood came on the telephone and told us that he was going to institute a police inquiry the following day. This was it. I had not been really anxious before, it seemed now, but real anxiety set in at the thought of police action, just as a sick person often feels more sick when first taken to a

would cease their labours of cleaning and gardening to indulge in an exchange of hostilities.

"Get that bliddy cloot aff that young gress!" Mattha would bellow.

"You and your old grass!" Loose would answer back.

"Cloot! That's the sitting-room carpet!" Daze would add.

"You an' yer bliddy kerpits! An' yer cleanin' an' yer skitterin' about! . . . Here, whaur ye gaun wi' that hammer o' mines?"

"I want to nail down the—"

"Nail doon yer behind! Ye couldnae hit a palin' stab! Gi'e me that hammer afore Ah get sweerin' at yees! Whit noo are yees needin' nailin' doon? If iver Ah saw twae weemen creatit by the Almichty as a cross fur folk tae pit up wi', it's yous twae!"

Strange things happen, and one of these was that Mattha, Loose and Daze had settled down into a state of armed neutrality that dated from the time of Monica's disappearance. Less than a year ago we used to have a weekly crisis when either Loose or Daze would tell us that unless that 'dirty, spitting old man' was forbidden the place *they* could not stay. There were no such crises now. They had frequent battles in the kitchens and in the garden, but they had, all three, apparently decided that the world contained all three of them and that the fact could not be altered.

And another change that I noted in my mind as I watched the three of them disappear into the Ben-the-Hoose with the hammer was that Loose and Daze were different. They would always in some degree be huntresses – though neither very chaste nor very fair – for they had been born that way, but their liking for one another now dominated their marauding propensities against the male of the species. Men were all very well, they seemed to indicate, but a nice evening spent with Loose or Daze, either at home or at the cinema, had a great deal to commend it, and really – although you wouldn't admit this in public – much more restful and comfortable than having to entertain a gentleman.

They knew, of course, of Twice's new appointment, and when they were first told of it the uppermost thought in their minds was: "But what about Crookmill?"

"Well, what about it?" Twice asked.

"Will you be selling it?" Daze asked fearfully.

"Good lord, no! Flash and I have to have a home somewhere!"

"The kitchen will get very damp if it's shut up for a long time - it's kind of close to the burn on that side," she told him.

"Oh, we won't shut it up. We'll be able to let it quite a bit to people from Slatersub."

"Oh!"

"But, Daze, we thought that you and Loose would maybe stay and look after it for us, anyway," I said.

Their nice, foolish faces became bright with pleasure. "We could pay you rent for our rooms!" said Loose.

It made me want to cry. "Don't be foolish!" I said. "You get the rooms for looking after the place while we're away."

"Oh!" they said, and rushed off to vent their delight in a fresh orgy of baking and cleaning.

It was Loose or Daze or both, of course, who discovered that Martha's twenty-first birthday fell during the third week of her stay in Ballydendran and I was at once asked if we could have a party.

"What sort of party?" Twice asked, looking up from his book.

"Well, we thought," said Daze, "seeing they're Americans and so daft about Scotland we would have a sort of supper with scotch broth and haggis and a raisin dumpling and things like that—"

"Ah dinnae like haggis!" said Mattha, appearing like an evil genius. "Sheep's guts, that's whit it is! Gi'e me a gidd mealy puddin' an'—"

"You be quiet!" said Daze.

"Wait till you're invited to the party before you say what you want to eat!" said Loose.

"If then!" said Daze.

"Sheep's guts!" said Loose in antistrophe.

"Be quiet, the lot of you!" I shouted before the thing could get out of hand. "All right. Give an evening party but cut out the haggis - nobody will eat the dam thing anyway, and it wouldn't be the real thing at that. I'm fed up with all this food rationing. Daze, you'd better write to my aunt at Reachfar and see if she can send down some ~~meat~~ ~~of some~~ thing."

"Will we get a gidd big raisin dumplin' biled in a cloot?" Mattha asked wistfully. "Ah huvnae had a bit o' raisin dumplin' since the New Year."

"It's the suet—" said Daze thoughtfully.

"Suet?" Mattha asked. "Ah'll sin get ye some suet!"

"How?" asked Twice, who was always interested in Mattha's machinations.

"Weel, that new man Burnside doon at the slaughter-hoose wis speirin' at me in the Royal the ither nicht aboot the slaughter-hoose drain - it seems the sanitary man's efter him aboot it an' they cannae get it tae clear richt. That drain has aye been a bother - it wis that auld Mick Fairlie that laid it an' Mick wis half Irish. Ye niver ken jist whit kin' o' a twist an Irishman will pit in a drain - or in onything else - they jist cannae seem tae help it, like."

"And do you know where the bend in the drain lies?" Twice asked.

"Och, aye. Ah wis at the biggin' o' the slaughter-hoose when Mick pit it in."

"But you haven't told Burnside?"

"Fur the price o' wan beef fae Burnside? Ah'm no' that daft. Forbye, Ah havnae muckle time fur him. He's a hell o' a man tae blether."

"But you might tell him now?"

"Ah nicht."

"Mattha, you are an old twister!"

"Me?" squeaked Mattha, scandalized. "Kennin' aboot drains is verra specialized knowledge, that's whit it is. An' specialized knowledge is worth a pun o' suet when Ah'm needin' it or Burnside's drain can be stappit for a' eternity for a' Ah care. It's no' *me* the sanitary is efter!"

So, dependent on the delivery of the suet, Mattha was promised his 'dumplin' in a cloot', and Loose and Daze had begun to plan a raiding expedition by bus round all the local villages in search of currants and raisins, when Martha danced into the room and said: "I've got a package for you, Janet! Matt and Jim are bringing it."

Matt and Jim staggered into the room with a huge wooden crate.

"What on earth is that?" I asked.

"Currants and things to put in cakes," said Martha. "You said one night they were hard to get here."

"Holy Moses!" said Mattha. "Whaur's ma hammer?" He, Loose and Daze fell upon the crate and soon the floor as littered with packages of dried fruit of all kinds and ttle drumlike containers of vegetable shortening.

"I ought to start a shop!" I said. "Martha, I can never thank you. But where did you get them?"

"New York," said Martha, as if it were a shop round the corner. "I cabled Ian and they came over in the *Queen Mary* with a friend of his."

"Prunes!" said Twice. "Golly!"

"Noo, that's a thing Ah niver get nooadays," said Mattha, "prunes an' rice puddin'. Ah used tae be real fond o' prunes an' rice, an' it's a gran' thing fur the workin' o' the inside intae the bargain."

"You can't get *rice*, you old fool!" said Loose and Daze in one voice.

"Shut up!" Twice hissed at them. "Want the *Queen Elizabeth* to come in next week with a cargo of rice?"

Loose and Daze went into their customary frenzy of preparation, I did a certain amount of telephoning to bid the guests, and the evening of Martha's birthday party came along. Martha had then, and still has, the ability of the child to grasp at simple pleasures with both hands. She was, in spite of a background of great wealth, completely unspoilt and also completely unsophisticated and brought to everything the freshness that a child brings to a new experience. When she arrived at Crookmill on the evening of her party she was like a child attending her very first celebration. Twice told her so as he welcomed her.

"But it is!" she cried. "It is the first time for my *Scottish* birthday party!"

Twice and I had decided to give her a circular silver brooch with a cairngorm set in it, and when, with quick fingers, she had it out of the box and pinned to her dress she cried: "Look, Jim, look! Gee! Look at my Crookmill cairngorm pin!"

"If I know anything about the parties around this joint, you'll be saying Crookmill cairnmill gorm in an hour or so," said a deep, insolent, American-accented voice from the doorway. "Howdy, folks! May I meet your new friends?"

Elegant to the last burnished hair, Monica sauntered into the room.

"Good God!" Twice muttered and slid away in the direction of the kitchen.

"Hello, Monica," I said. I felt as if roots had grown out through the soles of my feet into the carpet. "Come right in."

She came towards me. "Have a dram," I said.

"Merci bien." She gave me her sidelong glance.

She came close up to me so that her back was to the room and the people, while my back was against the wall.

"I know you are too *bien-élevée*," she said softly, "to slap my face in front of your guests. That's why I appeared tonight."

"I'm not going to slap your face, anyway," I said.

"Why not?"

"It wouldn't be one bit nice," I said, quoting a refined woman whom we had both loathed during the war.

She raised the veil of eyelashes and looked straight at me for a second. "I see," she said.

"That's good." I handed her a drink. "Try to behave yourself."

"I'll be ever so nice," she said, "and help to make your party go." She glanced round the room. "Who is that two and a half yards of potential cowboy over there? I think you had better lead me to him."

"Come along," I said and moved in the direction of Jim Garvin and Martha, but she shook my wrist in her hand, arresting me for a moment.

"I *can* be nice," she said, looking at me wide-eyed for another instant.

"I know," I said. "You can be very, very nice."

But, not for the life of me, could I be 'nice' to Monica.

After I had made the introductions between her and the Garvins I moved away round the room, but very shortly Martha was at my elbow.

"Say, Janet, is it a 'just because' not to talk about it?"

"About what?"

"Lady Monica's title!" Her eyes were sparkling with excitement. "I collect them - ones I've met, I mean - and I've got five Lady Surnames, but this is my first Lady Christian-name and it's just wonderful!"

I went across with Martha to where Monica was talking to Jim Garvin, Sir Andrew and Mr Slater.

"I understand," Jim said as we came forward, "that Lady

Monica here has just gotten over a disappearing act. I'd have thought nobody could disappear in a country this size with your police system!"

"But I'm smarter than most!" said Monica.

"Damn' silly affair from start to finish!" Sir Andrew barked.

"Of course it was!" said Monica. "And all a misunderstanding, anyway. You know I hate writing letters. And I was certain that Janet's father would mention when he wrote that I was up there—"

"Damned liar!" I thought, and as if she had heard the thought she shot a glance at me.

"—and so he did, in the end," she finished with a grin.

"Well, don't do it again!" said Sir Andrew. "You know, Slater, I've just been looking at these drawings again and—"

"Monica," I said, "do you know what a 'just because' is?"

"A 'just because'? No. Is it a thing like a *Suivez-moi-jeune-homme* — you know, a little fluttery ribbon at the back of a hat?"

"No," I said. "Nothing like that. Martha knows all about 'just because's'."

"A 'just because' is a thing that you do or don't do for no very obvious sorta reason — like drinking soup in a certain way, you know?" Martha asked earnestly.

"Oh!" said Monica, equally earnestly. "That must be the American for it. In English, that's a 'why-why-not'."

"Why?" I asked, drawn even against my own will into the old word nonsense between Monica and myself.

"Why not?" said Monica. "Because of the March Hare — why ask riddles that haven't any answers? — why not? — but a 'just because' is a very nice name for them too."

"Say," said Jim Garvin to me, "I've lost the place. This is the darnedest conversation I ever been mixed up in. Where were we at?"

"At 'just because'," said Monica. "Why?"

"Why not?" said Jim.

"You keep out of this," said Martha.

As Martha hesitated, I said: "Monica understood it. There was a 'just because' why she should —"

Monica, and I said I didn't think so."

"Lord, no!" said Monica. "As every one would say. It's very civil of —"

primitive customs - I find the British peerage quite fascinating myself."

"Let me get everybody another dram," I said and collected their glasses.

Twice was busy at the sideboard with Mattha in his Sunday suit as head waiter. "There you are, Mattha," he said, putting a final glass on Mattha's tray. "Don't get them muddled or Loose and Daze will be reeling and we'll get no supper."

"Them twae? It's a mortal sin to gi'e them even a teaspoonfy o' the Article. Ah've tellt ye till Ah'm tired that ye should get port wine f'ae the grocer fur them!"

He went off about his duties, which he did very well and with great pride, never forgetting to assure all whisky-drinkers that their glasses contained 'the Article'.

"It's a long time since I saw you," I told Twice as I put my four glasses on the sideboard. "A small one for Martha, please, and three ordinaries for Monica, Jim and me."

"I've been taking cover," said Twice, busy with his decanter. "How is she?"

"Chastened," I said.

"She'll never be that."

"Everything is comparative," I told him, "and relative - Einstein will tell you that. Get yourself a drink and come on over."

"All right."

He picked-up his glass and went over to the little group in the corner.

"-and if you got married," Martha was asking eagerly "what would your husband be?"

Monica tilted her head so that the red-gold curtain of hair fell away from her face as she looked upwards. "We would be Mr James Garvin and Lady Monica Garvin," she said.

"Not Lady *James* Garvin?"

"No. For that, *he* would have to be Lord James Garvin and the son of a duke."

"Too bad, Jim!" said Twice. "Have a dram, Monica!" and he handed her her glass.

"Ah've been listenin' tae ye, ye wee bizzom!" said Mattha, appearing behind Jim Garvin like Mephistopheles in an ill-produced play. "Whin Ah wis at the schule, we used tae

urn whit they ca' poetry an' Ah mind a bit aboot kind
arts bein' mair nor coronets—"

"And it was also about some rather parvenu people of
orman blood!" said Monica scathingly. "Besides, you
ave about the unkindest heart I know, Mattha Vere de
ere. How are you, anyway?"

"No' muckle the better for the askin'," said Mattha, "Ah
ear ye've been up in the Heilan's?"

"I liked the company up there," Monica told him.

"Ah'm gled ye enjoyed yersel'. Iphm. Weel, Ah'm awa'
ae get a dram fur masel' noo an' then gae ben tae the kitchen
n' see whit them twae's at noo." He turned to Twice. "An'
ah'll kin'le ma pipe an' hae a bit smoke when Ah'm ben
here an' if ye're needin' me ye ken whaur tae get me."

"The perfect butler," said Monica as he creaked away.
"This damned place is madder than ever."

"Not really, Monica," said Twice.

There was a brittle uneasiness among us and I could see
that the Garvins were aware of it. I could feel Twice's mind
darting about, like my own, like a fish in a trap, seeking a
way out and becoming more and more panic-stricken by the
instant, when Monica's voice, very cool, very Loame, with
the garnered experience of generations of difficult situations
behind it, said: "There are some things that never fail to
surprise one." She looked thoughtfully from one of the Gar-
vins to the other, then at Twice and me, and then back to
the Garvins. "When Janet first told me that she was going
to marry Twice I didn't think it would work at all. Now
they are the happiest couple I know. I always have to
remark on it. It is most disconcerting how wrong one can
be."

Just like that, without uttering one word that was not the
truth, yet without saying one word that disclosed any-
thing untoward, she swept aside the tension, confessed to
her own feeling of guilt and contrived to convey a form
of apology. The sheer impudence of it left Twice and me
speechless.

Not, now, that the party would have been marred if I
and I had been permanently stricken dumb. Monica had
taken it over, and played all her cards of her looks, her
and the glamour of her title for the Garvins. I was con-
scious all the time that, socially, I should be grateful to her

for making Martha's birthday an evening that she would remember, but to be conscious of what one should be is a very different thing from what one is. If we were all what we know we should be, most women would be a combination of Cleopatra, Madame Schiaparelli, Juliet and Mrs Beeton or something like that instead of the combination of shrew, last year's hat, raw juvenile and tin-opener that they mostly are, so perhaps it is not surprising that I, who should have been the gracious hostess of Crookmill, was tending to stand around in corners and seethe the kid of my spite at Monica in the milk of my human unkindness which was away past boiling point and sadly curdled by the time the party was over.

As a result of the party, the Garvins once more postponed their departure from Ballydendran, and when they were not driving to the Border Abbeys or to the Trossachs or to Stirling or to Edinburgh they were at Crookmill. Monica either drove about the country with them or stayed in the Ben-the-Hoose, packing, but as Twice and I had arranged to take over from her the furniture she had acquired, the packing seemed to be the merest excuse, though for what we were not sure.

She seemed to spend quite a lot of time alone, she was no longer giving parties, but I did not interfere — indeed, I tried not even to think of her because of an unpleasant feeling that I did not at the moment want any truck with her. Strangely, her most welcome visitor and the person who spent most time with her was old Mattha, and after each of his visits to her he would come back to his chair by the stove in our kitchen, which he regarded as his own, and sit smoking his pipe, one gnarled old hand holding its bowl and the left elbow resting on the chair arm, the forearm upright, the palm turned outwards, as if the hand were about to push aside a screen that would expose some searched-for truth to his gaze. I have always liked old people, standing as they do in their wisdom between the long past of their remembered experience and the utterly unknown of their short futures, and time and again, in old people, I have noticed this waiting, upheld hand.

"Aye," he said to me one day, coming out of one of his waiting silences, "the lad was tellin' me that ye wis thinkin' on a bit trip tae the Heilan's yersel's."

He frequently referred to Twice as 'the lad'.

"Yes," I said, "Twice has a backlog of leave due to him and we thought we'd go up with the Garvins and Matthew. My family haven't really seen me walking yet."

"Aye, that'll be fine fur them. Ah've niver been tae the Heilan's. Ah've seen Loch Lomon' an' Ah wis tae Perth yince tae a ca'le show, but that's no' the Heilan's."

"Would you like to come, Mattha?" I asked him. "My father and my aunt and uncle always ask about you and they've never seen you since that awful time when I was so sick."

"Ah wid like it fine," he told me. "Folk is no' their richt sel's when a body is as seeck as ye wis yon time. Ah took tae yer faither, though Ah cud see the pare man wis that anxious he wisnae like his richt sel' at a'. . . . Aye, Ah wid like it fine. But there widnae be room in the caur, now, nor in the Reachfar hoose aither, Ah'm thinkin'."

"Oh, we're taking two cars - after all, the Garvins are going on to John o' Groats - and they and Matthew are booked at the hotel, anyway. There'll be plenty of room at Reachfar. If you think your rheumatics will stand the long seat in the car, come, Mattha!"

"Mebbe Ah will. An' thank ye. . . . A fine cairry-on, makin' a trip tae the Heilan's at ma age!"

"How old are you, Mattha?"

"Och, no' that auld. Ah'll be seeventy-seven come Michaelmas. Ma faither lived tae be ninety-three an' a' his ain teeth. Ma teeth are no' near sae gidd as his wis - it's a' they dentists - but he wis faur waur wi' the rheumatics nor me. Ma faither wis a beer-drinkin' man - Ah believe on the Article fur the rheumatics masel'. . . . Aye, that fellah Garvin has a bit notion fur the wee yin ben there," he said suddenly.

"Who? Monica?" I pretended to be surprised to please Mattha, but I was not surprised, really. As I had told Twice, men fell for Monica like ninepins.

"Whae else? Did ye think Ah meant that auld harridan Loose as ye ca' her? Loose by name an' Loose by naitur. Mind ye, she's no' near as damt aggravatin' as she yince wis. . . . Naw, he has a fair notion fur the wee yin."

"What makes you think that?"

"Whit?"

"About Jim and Monica, of course!"

"Ah've seen a wheen o' cocks on a wheen o' middens. Ah ken the signs."

"Oh!"

"D'ye think she'll tak' him?" he asked.

"I've no idea, Mattha."

"Och, weel, if *you* dinnae ken, naebuddy diz."

"Why should I know?" I asked him as I put my cake in the oven.

"Whit's in it?"

"What?"

"That cake."

"Cherries."

"When are ye gaun tae mak' a richt gingerbreed? Them twae — Daze an' the ither yin — cannae mak' a richt yin."

"All right. I'll make one now," I said.

"That's the ticket. Mak' a richt gidd black yin an' kin' o' saft. . . . It's you that kens her better nor onybuddy else," he reverted to the subject of Monica. "She's got plenty o' money, hisn't she? She's no' broken-down, like some o' the gentry?"

"No. The Loames are not what you'd call broken-down," I agreed.

"So she widnae tak' him fur his money. Aye. He wad suit her fine. He's no' as damt saft as ye micht think."

"I don't think Jim Garvin is soft at all!" I protested.

"He's saft about *her*, though. But every man mak's a neddy o' himsel' about some wumman. Ah've been a neddy masel' in ma time."

"Then that makes it conclusive," I said.

"Nane o' yer impidence! *Your* lad's no' a neddy, though."

"No?" I said, watching treacle run out of one of Martha's beautiful cans from New York.

"Naw. It wid be a clever wumman that wid bamboozle *him* — yin as fly as *you* as a ma'er o' fack." He creaked up out of his chair. "Weel, sittin' here on ma backside'll no' get the kin'lin' sticks cut." He knocked his pipe out into the coal bucket. "Ye should ask the wee yin ben there tae come up tae the Heilan's wi' us."

"Why?" She's only just back from Reachfar!" I turned away from my baking to make the protest.

"She wid like fine tae get comin', Ah'm thinkin'," he

said and went away out to the woodshed, leaving me standing in the middle of the kitchen floor.

It may be my early training by my grandmother that makes me have so much respect for age and its opinions, but I do not think so entirely. I think it is logical that an average intelligence that has watched the world for seventy-seven years should have opinions more likely to be valuable than an average intelligence that has only some forty years of observation on which to base its opinions. I was also of the belief that Mattha's intelligence, to start with, was of a higher level than my own, and I tended to give weight to his opinions. I was not vitally interested in his idea that Jim Garvin 'had a notion' for Monica. In the time I had known her so many notions had been entertained for her by so many men that I would have been more interested had I been told that Jim Garvin could not bear the sight of her. After all, even Twice, who was eccentric enough, apparently to prefer me, had been the first to agree that Monica was an eyeful, a heartful and a mindful for any man who had an open eye, heart and mind. No, the facet of Mattha's discourse that interested me was his suggestion that Monica should join the expedition to Reachfar. *Not* John o' Groats - Reachfar. And it interested me because the very idea of taking her with us on our holiday was repugnant to me.

You know how it is when there is something you know you ought to think about that you would rather not think about so you think about any other thing under the sun in order to escape from thinking about the thing that really needs thinking about? You travel round it in a muddle of loose thought and repetition just like that sentence back there. At least I do. I have not got the courage of my friend Edna who has added a phrase to our family vocabulary. Edna is British by birth but regards New York as her spiritual home - it is to her what Moscow was to the three sisters - and in the aftermath of the 1939-45 War her husband was working in Buenos Aires and Edna was down there with him and, as Damon Runyan would say, it began to come on Christmas.

"I want to go to New York for Christmas," said Edna.

"Well, you can't," said her husband. "I can't get the dollars for a trip like that."

"I want to go to New York."

"Now, Edna, don't be silly. Dollars are not allowed for pleasure jaunting. You *cannot* go!"

"I want to go to New York for Christmas," Edna said.

"Listen, there's no point in going on like that! You need dollars to go to New York and I can't get the dollars. If I were as rich as Croesus I couldn't get a *permit* to buy dollars for a pleasure trip!"

"I PREFER NOT TO THINK ABOUT THAT," said Edna. "I want to go to New York for Christmas!"

Well, like Edna, I preferred not to think about Monica going to Reachfar with us, but, unlike Edna, I did not have the courage to say so, even to myself. Not me. I believe that if anyone were to ask me I would say that I am one of these forthright people who face things squarely, look facts in the face, study a problem from all angles, but that would be what Martha would call a 'lotta hooey'. I am not like that at all, for, instead of facing up to this problem about Monica, I began to hold a large, foaming-at-the-mouth indignation meeting inside myself. "The impudence! She creates a year of merry hell in my life, chases my husband round Birmingham in a pink satin nightgown, and now she wants us all to have a happy holiday together at *my* home with *my* family! The impertinence of it! And suborning old Mattha too! The absolute—"

The whipped-up, internal indignation meeting did not last long, proving very unsatisfactory, and almost without realizing it I slipped from thinking of Monica and Reachfar to thought of Reachfar only. I think I have already said that my home and my childhood are never very far from my thoughts, especially when the things that I have to think about at the present time do not please me.

I had not been home since my illness, but my family — of course my grandparents were dead now — in the persons of my father, my uncle and my aunt had all been down to Crookmill at various times since I had been bedridden. Tom had not come, for he was very old and had never been south of Inverness even in his youth, holding the very reasonable view that there probably was a city called Edinburgh, just as there probably was a country called Peru, because he had met people who said they had been to those places and he also knew that there was a big, reddish star, because he had

seen it himself, which the minister said was a special sort of star called a planet and its name was Mars, but Tom had no urge to visit either Edinburgh, Peru or Mars. Reachfar would do fine for him, he said, and look at that now, he said, that branch on that tree shaped just like a big capital 'S'. He had never noticed that before, he said, although he must have passed that tree a thousand times; and do you know, he said, that the swallows are building in the old chaffcutter of all places? At over eighty Tom would no doubt still be seeing new things at Reachfar to marvel at, I thought. It would be good to see him again. And Reachfar. But one did not want Monica at Reachfar. . . .

The year had now passed the peak of mid-June. It was warm in my nice kitchen and the air was rich with the smell of baking gingerbread and the scent from the garden vegetables that lay by the sink and the odour from the little piece of mutton that Mattha and I would have for our lunch. I was enjoying myself in my own kitchen, with plenty of flour and eggs and all the good things that had come out of the New York crate. Twice would not be back until the evening, and Loose and Daze had gone with Matthew and the Garvins on a shopping expedition to Glasgow. I could have an orgy of baking and make as much mess as I liked and enjoy to the full my recovered ability to use my hands and my body for the small, satisfactory tasks that had to be done around my own home. I would make a huge Black Bun, I decided, to take to Reachfar for Tom.

I plunged into the store cupboard again and laid hands on a fresh packet of raisins and another of currants – Daze would be mad, but let her be! Martha had given the crate to *me*, after all! I had the mixing bowl full of a rich and glutinous mass of fruit, spices, pepper, sugar, treacle and flour all moistened with a little whisky when Monica came into the kitchen, the acme of elegance in a new silk-tweed suit, a cocktail shaker in one hand and two glasses in the other.

"What in Christendom is that?" she asked, sniffing over the bowl.

I was panting a little with the effort of moving the wooden spoon round in the mixture. "Nothing in Christendom. As Martha would say, strickly pagan, this – Black Bun."

"Crikey! Have a snootful of gin and french for elevenses.

Nothing like it for making spoons and things go round. I came to tell you I'm going to Edinburgh."

"Oh?" I put a cloth over my bowl of mixture and got my tin of cigarettes from the dresser.

"I've an appointment with Alex."

"Haven't seen Alex in ages," I said, "Give him our love."

I took the gingerbread out of the oven and put it to cool as Mattha came in with a basket of logs for the sitting-room fire.

"That's the Article!" he said.

"No. It's gin," said Monica. "Want one?"

"Naw. Rot yer guts, that's a' it is. Ah'd rather hae a bo'le o' beer."

"In the passage cupboard," I said. "Help yourself."

He took a large tumbler from the dresser and disappeared with his basket of firewood.

"That old article," said Monica, "thinks, in his own parlance, that the sun shines out of your behind!"

"Nonsense!" I said. "And I don't object to that sort of parlance from Mattha - it's in character. In you, it isn't."

"Sorry," she said. "Sometimes one's character gets a little frayed and tattered at the edges."

My mind veered away from this intimacy. "That suit isn't frayed or tattered at the edges," I told her. "You look very smart."

"Like it?" She looked down at the sleek line of the skirt. "It's one of Paul Caraday's - he's a squealing pansy but a coming boy in the rag trade. Inge has given him all her clothes for this South American tour. That should help him."

"Help him? It will make him."

Inge was Monica's fabulously smart and wealthy sister-in-law who figured in all the shiny magazines and was invariably mentioned in the Sunday press of the type that periodically lists the World's Best-dressed Women.

"How is Inge, by the way?" I asked.

"More of a bitch than ever. What I can't understand is how it doesn't show in her face. But it doesn't. She looks like a well-groomed Nordic angel with dew in her eyes, and her tongue drips more venom than ever. How Philip stands it

I don't know. Insulation of some sort, I suppose. Of course, she's first-class socially — it's in the family she's such a cow. . . . Do you ever get sick to death of your family, Jan?"

"I don't think so," I said. "Of course, I don't have a big lot of them or such a mixture of them as you do."

She tipped the shaker over my glass. "Sorry it isn't a full second wing," she said, pouring what was left into her own glass. "It was just the dregs of a gin bottle. Filthy word, dregs. Makes you think of all that glub a dredger shovels up. . . . I've got frightfully sick of the family lately." I made no comment. "I can't lay my finger on why, quite. But that hoo-ha I had to go down to about the Derbyshire place was just about the end. It's not a place that anybody cares a damn about — it came into the family about 1800 through a marriage. It's a nice enough house, Georgian, not very big — but none of us has ever lived there. It has always been let, but it's bigger than most people want now, so it's been empty for a couple of years. Some farming people have the land on rent, but they don't want the house and the garden and so on, and a girls' school wanted them, so Papa thought he would sell. Golly, did the balloon go up?"

"Why?"

"God knows! Nobody else does. There were about thirty Loames sitting round a table all bawling about a house that they had never seen — half of them hadn't, anyway — and a house that didn't belong to them at that. Aunt Pat was accusing Papa of laying waste her Edward's inheritance, and Uncle Egbert was accusing him of Communism, and Cousin Lorimer was saying: 'Give it for a youth hostel' — he is always twaddling on about the nation's youth but he has been careful to stay a bachelor. But what they were all after, really, was that the Loame family must be rent by a major difference of opinion at all costs. Everybody must be suspicious of everybody else's motives. My family must always be in a state of civil war. They'd make you sick. When I think of other families' ways of living— Here, I've got to go. . . . Want anything from Edinburgh?"

"No, thank you."

"All right. I'm off." She ran along the passage but ran back to push her head round the door. "I say, tell Twice I've borrowed that spare jack of his. I don't know where mine is. I think I must have left it at Reachfar."

I was taking the cloth from the top of my mixing bowl as I heard her car drive away down the stony road from Crookmill to the main highway, and as I began to plough my wooden spoon through the mixture again I wondered what the reason for her visit had been. I had not been alone with her since she came back, except for the few moments at Martha's party, and as far as knowing what was in her mind went I had not been alone with her now. Monica was not as easy to fathom as Mattha, I thought. And, of course, I myself had not helped her to be forthcoming. But she had used Reachfar as an exit line. . . .

"Whaur's she awa' tae noo?" Mattha asked, putting his beery tumbler in the sink.

"Edinburgh."

"She's a hell o' a leear, that lassie," he continued. "She can tell lees by sayin' a thing an' she can tell them by sayin' naething an' she can tell them sideways an' backsideforemost. Telin' me it wis gin yees wis drinkin' - as if Ah didnae ken the smell o' the Article at ma age!"

"It *was* gin and vermouth!" I said, springing to Monica's defence. "The article, as you call it, is in the black bun I'm mixing."

"Och, weel, nae hard feelin's. She's a hell o' a leear a' the same even if she telt the truth by accident aboot the gin. She's hidin' somethin', that's whit she is."

So well she might be hiding something, I thought. She had plenty to hide if one thought over her past behaviour.

"It's a black bun, ye said?" Mattha peered into the mixture. "Aye, it hiz the richt smell. Ah'm very fond o' a bit o' black bun."

"It's for Tom at Reachfar."

"Och, aye, Ah've heard aboot him, the auld sowl. Och, weel, he'll be sharin' it wi' us, likely. . . . Did ye tell the wee yin to come on up there wi' the rest o' us?"

"No, I didn't!" I said snappishly as I measured the flour for the pastry case for my bun. "And stop bullying me, Mattha. I don't know where you got this notion that Monica wants to go back to Reachfar, but no doubt if she wants to come she will tell me so."

"There's nae need tae get yer dander up!" he said. "An' Ah'll tell ye somethin' fur nothin' - she'll *no'* tell ye, an' ye can pit that in yer pipe an' smoke it!"

"What's all the mystery? Why shouldn't she tell me?"

"Ah dinnae ken, but she'll no'." He lit a spill of paper at the stove and began to suck at his burned and bitten old pipe. "This bliddy thing's stappit again!" he said. "It's the teebacca - fu' o' taur, that's whit it is!"

The pipe sucked and gurgled and stank. I left my pastry and went to Twice's pipe-rack in the living-room and took out a pipe that had been given him at Christmas which he did not like because the bowl was too small and the stem too slender for his strong teeth.

"Here!" I said to Mattha. "Fill that one and see if it's any better."

"Hey, that's wan o' the lad's pipes!"

"He doesn't use it. He'd bite through that stem in a week. He said you were to have it."

"My, but that's a richt bonnie sweet wee pipe! Ah'll be richt prood o' it. The lad's a fine fellah, ye ken, lassie."

"I know that," I said, concentrating on my pastry. Nobody knew better than I did what a fine fellow Twice was.

"He's no' a man that wad like tae come atween freen's an—"

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"That's Dram, Mattha," I said, holding up my floury hands. "Let him in for me, please."

"My, my!" said Mattha as Dram trotted in with a big rabbit in his mouth. "My, but ye're gettin' tae be a richt fine poacher o' a dug! Here, gi'e me that rabbit ere Ah kill it fur ye."

"Take it outside, for goodness' sake, and kill it!" I said. "Dram, why the devil don't you kill your things before you bring them in?"

Dram looked at me as if to remind me of what I had said the day he brought in the butcher's cat - dead.

"It's a fine young yin," said Mattha, coming back with the dead rabbit. "Ye widnae conseeder makkin' a rabbit pie wi' it?"

"I might, if you would consider skinning and guttin' me."

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"That wee yin ben there wid be a bliddy sight better if she'd been brocht up richt."

"Brought up richt?" I repeated foolishly.

"Aye - tae ken aboot cookin' an' bakin' an' bein' usefu' Whit gidd is it tae a wumman tae live a' her lane in the ben end o' a hoose even if she *can* speak French an' Eytalian. The bother wi' that wee yin is that she doesnae want a man o' her ain kind an' the ither kin' dinnae want *her*. . . Och weel, come on, Dram, ye article, ye. You an' me maun sort this rabbit fur the Missis." He creaked out into the garde and left me to my baking.

My mind veered away into escape from the thought of Monica again and I began to think of Mattha's phrase 'sort this rabbit'. In the Scotland of Mattha's generation the verb 'to sort' has a meaning that I have not come across elsewhere. It means to 'put to rights' and a parent, annoyed at a child, will say: 'If ye do that again I'll *sort* ye!' meaning 'If you do that again I will punish you in such a way that it will put you to rights for ever about that particular thing'. And, in Scotland, we may ask a carpenter to 'sort' a piece of woodwork for us or a shoemaker to 'sort' a shoe, by which we mean: 'put it to rights, repair it, make it usable or wearable.' So Mattha was making the rabbit fit for kitchen use by 'sorting' it.

A nice, homely word, I thought, with a flavour of the native earth about it, except for that one extraordinary Shakesperian phrase 'a sort of traitors'. That collective noun 'a sort of traitors'. Why a sort? Assortment? Sort. Covey and school had a collective sound, a *probable* sound, for what they described, for one could think of the comfortable fap partridges in a cosy covey, and the whales, especially the pompous kind that blow a fountain out of their noses, as a school of philosophers blowing wind and water into the air. But a sort of traitors? It was strange that the same word could feel homely and comfortable in one context and ugly and cacophonous in another. A sort of traitors. Traitor. The word suddenly turned into a picture of Monica that rose like a cloud over the horizon of my mind. I pushed the picture and the word into limbo and escaped again, but not for long.

It is true that Monica had been very much in and on my mind for weeks, but today it was as if I had had a fresh

injection of her when she had unexpectedly appeared in my kitchen in the fashionable new suit. There had been something exotic about her as she had stood there, the acme of moneyed elegance, against the utilitarian enamel draining-board of the sink. Physically she had momentarily taken on again the glamour that had always coloured her image in my mind.

This mind of mine is a little like the west attic of Reachfar as it was in my grandmother's time. My grandmother never threw anything away, but put anything she was not using at the moment in the west attic and I spent a lot of time up there on wet winter days. In those days many strange things were acquired by a household such as ours, for if a farm changed hands, there would be a sale and my grandmother would send my father or my uncle off with instructions like this: "Try and get the chain harrows if you can manage the price at all, and if that big hamper that Mrs. Morrison used to have for her eggs comes up and is going reasonable try and get it for me. It's on the big side for us, but the two egg baskets are fair done." Usually the hamper would come back to Reachfar, but not alone, for a thing of that nature would be filled with odd saucers, a colander, a few nails, a horse blanket, a chamber pot, a screwdriver and a mirror from the servant's bedroom and sold as a lot. At Reachfar the hamper would be cleaned and go into use while the rest of the lot would be sorted through and what was not wanted for immediate use would go up to the west attic. The west attic was a very interesting place. It being known that I was familiar with it and its contents, I was frequently 'sent up for a patch', which meant that I was shown my uncle's trousers perhaps, complete with hole, and had to find a piece of the tweed from which they had originally been made, for Mr Grant the tailor made all the family's heavy clothes and had to deliver the clippings along with the garment. To be sent for a patch was a dull job, for it meant looking through all the big-rag bags that hung on a row of pegs and most of the materials in them were very dull -- grey and brown tweeds, old pillow-cases and scraps of flannelette shirting. One winter day, though, I was sent to find a patch for my grandfather's heaviest jacket which was probably half a century old, and I sorted through about six boxes without finding the right thing, so I took the

seventh bag right off its peg, held it up by the bottom corners and, with an impatient shake, tipped its entire contents into the middle of the floor. When I had thrown aside the bag, on the top of the dun-coloured heap was the most beautiful scrap of material I had ever seen. It was some sort of brocade, I suppose, but to me it seemed to contain all the jewel colours of the Indies as well as gold and silver, and it lay there in the dusty gloaming of the attic glowing with an exotic light. In this light the walls of the attic receded to the far boundaries of the world and a gorgeous procession of caparisoned elephants, peacocks with spread tails and men and women with yellow skins and feathered headdresses and robes of silk hung with jewels, floated past before my astonished eyes, while the bells of a thousand temples sounded in my bemused ears.

Monica, in my mind, had always had something of the quality that that scrap of brocade had had that first day I saw it among the heap of drab clippings in the west attic. She could always open for me a vista of far places, of strange customs, of another world. In cliché parlance, I suppose that she had spelled romance to me, caught me in romance as in a silken web, and, in spite of all that had happened, she had done it afresh today, in my own kitchen, by my own sink.

I ought, I supposed, to tell Monica that Twice and I wanted her rooms so that Twice could have his drawing-office, hasten her departure from Crookmill and put an end to the whole absurd situation, but I knew that I would not do that. I did not know why I would not do it. I knew merely, but with certainty, that I would not do it. Then, as Twice had pointed out, the normal reaction to behaviour such as Monica's would be anger. "*Your friend* Monica has treated you abominably," he had said. Yes. To be angry and quarrel with her would be the standard, conventional reaction, but I have always tended to look askance at conventional reactions because, for me, they are so often false. My natural reaction was not to be angry with Monica or to quarrel with her. If those had been my reactions, they would have been translated into actions long ago. My temper is not the sort that waits to decide if it is going to go up in a blaze. It is of a highly combustible quality, my temper, and goes off with a bang at the first spark of the sort that ignites it. So, in this case, what Monica had done was not to make a spark of the

temper-igniting sort. No. There was nothing of clean, sudden fire about what she had done. No. What she had done had induced in me more of the sly, furtive festering of a poison in the mind.

I was spending a difficult, unhappy day. After Mattha and I had had our lunch I began to bake again. It was part of my escape apparatus, as I have since recognized, for I like to work with food, and the materials and utensils of cookery all have associations of smell and taste and texture and colour that come from my earliest childhood which was a very happy time in my life.

As I opened a tin of cinnamon and the fragrance rose from it, I thought of church at home when I was very small and the minister reading the hymn in its entirety in his soft, Hebridean voice, before the congregation began to sing :

*What though the spicy breezes
Blow soft o'er Sea-lion's isle . . .*

for that is how I heard the words, a sea-lion being an animal in one of my picture books, when I had not heard of the island of Ceylon. I was, for a long time, convinced that aromatic spices grew among the polar ice-floes where the sea-lions lived and that this was why they were so expensive and had to be used so sparingly.

Then, when the minister had finished reading, Big John the Blacksmith, in his sober, grey, Sunday clothes would rise from his special chair behind the communion table, give his tuning fork a firm yet respectful 'Ping-ong!' on the oak of the pulpit stairs and in his enormous but melodious voice sing out :

*From Greenland's icy mountains,
From Intia's coral strand . . .*

and gradually the rest of us would gain courage from him and soon all would be singing.

And I went on to remember now that it was Big John the Smith who first made me realize that a person is not just one person, that Big John, in his leather apron, with his hammer in his hand and his pipe in his mouth in his smithy, was not all there was of Big John the Smith. When I was very

small and first went to church I did not connect the grey figure behind the communion table with Big John at all. In my mind, although I did not mention it to anyone, I thought that the figure in the church was a tame angel who belonged there, put there by God to help us with the singing, and that his tuning fork was the sort of thing that so many biblical people had, like Moses having a staff and Aaron a rod. And then came the great evening when I was allowed to stay up really late for the first time and my family took me to a concert in the village. The concert was to make money for a thing called the Red Cross which helped the soldiers who were fighting in a war that had started in 1914, and Tom and I used to make money for the Red Cross too, so we had to help *other* people to make money for it. Tom said: "It's chust a plain matter of neighbourliness an' fair-dealing. Next time we have a pair of rabbits or a pound or two of rasps to be selling for *our* Red Cross, we canna be asking Mrs Macdougall to buy from us if we'll not be buying a ticket for her concert for *her* Red Cross."

I was very excited, not being quite sure what a concert was, but inclined to the belief that it would be something like church because I had been told that 'everybody would be singing', but it could not be exactly like church either, because my grandmother, my mother and my aunt were 'helping with the tea' and you did not eat at church except bread and wine at Communion and children were not allowed to go to church on Communion Sundays. I do not remember a thing about the concert except that, suddenly, the minister said: "And now our good friend Big John the Precentor will sing the 'Cooper O' Fife' for us—" and this person who was this thing called a precentor and was also the tame angel from the church but, strangest of all, was my friend Big John the Blacksmith came on to the platform in his Saturday suit and second-best boots and began to sing the funniest song I had ever heard in all my born days, with a jingle at the end of each verse that made you tap your toes on the bare wooden floor of the schoolroom.

This two-or-three-peopliness of Big John the Smith was one of the most remarkable discoveries I had made in my lifetime until then, I think. For many Sundays afterwards, when he was being the tame angel in church, I used to wonder if the wind might change and he would stay like

that and, if so, where in the world would Tom and I take Dick and Betsy, our plough horses, to have their shoes attended to? However, the wind did not change at the crucial moment. Big John remained, angel and blacksmith too, and, indeed, was still remaining in his house beside the smithy which was now a garage as well at the crossroads, some two and a half miles east of Reachfar.

Reachfar. Monica. What *was* all this about Monica and Reachfar? The place meant a great deal to me, for so much of memory for me was tied up in its every stone and tree and crystal spring rising among the heather of the moor, but it had none of this meaning for Monica. It was true that most of the people who visited Reachfar were entranced by it, but visits were usually made in the summer, for short periods, and the visitors did not know the rigours and isolation of its long, harsh winters, when the panoramic views were blotted out by a bleak grey curtain of bitter sleet and the wind lashed in fury across the dead brown morass of the moor. It was true that Reachfar had a steadfastness, a security of thick old walls settled down among their traditional pastures, but what age and sense of traditional security there was at Reachfar, compared with the manor of Beechwood, were as events of this morning compared with the happenings of all the yesterdays of a thousand years. Reachfar had nothing for Monica, I told myself, and Monica had nothing for Reachfar. Drat Mattha and his old man's notions and funny ideas! The rest of us would go north as we had planned and Monica could do what she liked. There was no *room* for her, anyway. Besides, she was only just *back* from Reachfar. Why should she want to go up there again?

Impatiently, I jerked a tray of cinnamon buns out of the oven, knocking the corner of the tray against the oven door, so that some three or four of the buns went sliding across the polished linoleum of the floor.

"Oh, damn and blast it!" I exploded.

"Is it safe to come in?" Twice inquired from the doorway, while Dram sidled between his legs in the direction of the nearest bun.

"Hi! Let that alone!" said Twice. "What's on the floor is mine!" Dram sat down, his eyes still on the bun. "What went wrong, Missis?"

"Oh, nothing. Just a touch of cl

"No harm done." Twice picked up the spilled buns and slipped one to Dram who yelped and dropped it again. "All right. Let it cool. I like them hot." He began to eat what he had salvaged. "Any tea going?"

"In a minute or two, pet. You are early."

"I know. Where's everybody?"

"All out, except Mattha, Dram and me."

"Hurray! Let's have a picnic tea in the garden. I'll do the carrying."

"All right."

"What a lot of grand smells, though! What on earth have you been doing?"

"My, but her an' me's fairly had a richt day o' it, the day!" said Mattha through the window. "We've got gingerbreed an' chirry cake an' rabbit pie an' rhubert tairt an' black bun - hey, whit's they ye're eatin'?"

"Cinnamon buns - want one?"

"Ah widnae see yin gaun' straucht by me!" Mattha reached in through the window.

We carried our tea out into the back garden where Mattha had caused to be built a bench that served as a table, and Twice carried out wooden chairs from the kitchen.

"My, but it's gran' weather!" said Mattha. "This is jist the very dab - Ah've got news fur ye, lad!"

"What?" Twice asked.

"Ah'm comin' up tae the Heilan's wi' yees."

"That's fine, Mattha!"

"Ye'll mebbe hae tae stop whiles on the road tae let me get oot an' stretch ma legs so that ma knees dinnae get ower stiff."

"Oh, we'll easily do that. We'll leave early in the morning and take our time on the road. Pity it wasn't tomorrow we were going - we could have taken the rabbit pie for our lunch."

"Maybe Dram will catch another rabbit," I said. "Will you, Dram?"

"Uff!" said Dram obligingly.

"That brute can bliddy nearly speak," said Mattha. "It wis yon time she was sae seeck - she wis fur iver bletherin' tae him. . . . Aye, Ah'm lookin' forrit ta seein' the Heilan's."

When we had finished tea and Mattha had thanked Twice

or his new pipe and had got it drawing to his satisfaction, he gave a crust to Dram and rose : "Ah'm awa' doon tae that wuld Jeanie Robson tae see if Ah can cadge a wheen eggs frae her. The Missis here has been gaun a bonnie length wi' the eggs the-day - there'll be nane fur yer breakfast the morn Ah'm thinkin' . . . Aye, Ah'm fairly lookin' forrit tae seein' the Heilan's. It's a peety the wee yin's no' comin' wi' us, and her that anxious tae get comin'."

He creaked away round the corner of the house and I glared malevolently after him.

"Monica, he means?" Twice said after a moment.

"Yes," I said shortly.

"If she wants to go to Reachfar, why doesn't she go?"

"How the devil do I know?" I was suddenly very cross indeed.

"Where is she, anyway?"

"Edinburgh."

"Doing what?"

I stared at Twice. "How do I know? Look, I'm tired of this! What's got into you and Mattha? You'd think Monica was some sort of idiot and I am her keeper. She told me she was going to Edinburgh and would be out for lunch. I didn't ask her *why* she was going to Edinburgh or what she was going to do there. Why should I? It's none of my business. I'm sick and tired of all this—"

"Have another cup of tea and keep your shirt on. Can't a bloke ask an idle question? I don't care if she's gone to Edinburgh to climb the Scott Monument! . . . No word of her getting out of the Ben-the-Hoose?"

"No."

Twice poured tea and fiddled with the sugar spoon.

"Flash, what is this about her wanting to go to Reachfar and yet not going?"

Twice has the knack of making me feel contrite just by looking at me. "I'm sorry I was ill-natured," I said. "Maybe I've been in the hot kitchen today for too long and have developed a touch of cook's temper. . . . It's Mattha - she has this idea that she wants to come with us to Reachfar and that she won't come unless I specially invite her. She's niggled on about it all day!"

This was not strictly true, in fact, but it is true that Mattha had been nig-nig-nig-nagging at me all day.

times when how things feel comes nearer to the truth than actual facts.

"Then why not invite her and see?" said Twice.

"I don't *want* to invite her!" I said sharply, and as soon as I had spoken the words I was surprised at myself. All the nebulous nasty thoughts of the day seemed suddenly to become a solid, concrete wall between me and Monica.

"Why not?" There is a relentlessness about Twice.

"I just don't. I don't know why."

"There must be a reason."

"Reason! Why should there be a reason for every silly little thing?"

"If a person is reasonable, there must somewhere be a reason for doing or not doing every silly little thing."

"Oh, rubbish! I just don't want Monica around Reachfar, then!"

"Why not?"

"Twice, do you have to go on and on and on?" I tried to keep my voice calm. "It seems to me that people are losing sight of certain aspects of this Monica situation — especially you and Mattha. *He* knew about her carrying-on with you and was extremely mean-minded about it while it was going on, but now he has swung round and talks about her as if she were a misunderstood angel. It doesn't seem to occur to either of you that I am being damned reasonable with her. Most women in my place would have told her a thing or two by now—"

"Don't talk like an idiot!" Twice broke in. "You are *not* most women, whatever that may mean. In point of fact it would be better if you *did* tell Monica a thing or two — whatever *that* may mean. Why don't you?"

I glared at him. "I don't know. That's just the trouble — I don't know what I want to tell her. I have never been in such a muddle in my life about anything. It would be conventional, I suppose, for me to haul off and tell her to clear out of here, out of my life, that I never want to speak to her again and a lot of stuff like that. But it wouldn't be — true."

"True?"

"No. It wouldn't give me any satisfaction. If it would, I'd have done it long ago. There is something in the whole situation that seems to me to go deeper than that, something that

a conventional blazing row between two women about a man won't satisfy."

"You are sure you are not just shrinking from the idea of a row about a man, as you put it? You are not the type that fights about that sort of thing, you know."

"I know. But it isn't that. No. It's not just that I don't want a row. After all, Monica and I could separate without the actual disgusting vulgar mechanics of a row. No. It's not so simple as that. It goes deeper," I repeated.

"I think you should invite her to Reachfar," said Twice.

"Edna! I want to go to New York for Christmas!" I snapped. "I'll do nothing of the sort! I don't *want* her at Reachfar, I tell you! Why *should* I have her there?"

"All right, Flash. Leave it. But I don't like to see you unhappy like this. But leave it. . . . Come for a walk up the hill before supper. Dram! Where's that hill-climbing, burn-paddling-in, rabbit-catching dog?"

Dram came galloping round the house and we went for a walk up the hill.

Nobody said any more about Monica and Reachfar, and Monica said nothing about it either, but do you know how the air can become heavy with a thing like that? I felt that Loose, Daze, the Garvins, Sir Andrew, the Slaters and even Mattha's conscripted-labour grandsons were all wondering why Monica was not coming to Reachfar with us, although my senses told me that not one of these people was even thinking about it, for they did not even know that she wanted to go. But there are times when what your senses tell you does not matter – you do not live entirely by your senses. I, when I come to think of it, use my senses only for things like eating and drinking, washing my face and interviewing the butcher – I do the large remainder of my living by some means that does not seem to have much connection with my senses.

And my senses, of course, were very active about telling me that there was no reason in the world why Monica should not come to Reachfar with us. My family liked her and so did the other people who were going, and there was plenty of room for her in the house when we reached it, but my feelings told me that I did not want her with me at Reachfar, even if everybody else wanted her to be there.

times when how things feel comes nearer to the truth than actual facts.

"Then why not invite her and see?" said Twice.

"I don't *want* to invite her!" I said sharply, and as soon as I had spoken the words I was surprised at myself. All the nebulous nasty thoughts of the day seemed suddenly to become a solid, concrete wall between me and Monica.

"Why not?" There is a relentlessness about Twice:

"I just don't. I don't know why."

"There must be a reason."

"Reason! Why should there be a reason for every silly little thing?"

"If a person is reasonable, there must somewhere be a reason for doing or not doing every silly little thing."

"Oh, rubbish! I just don't want Monica around Reachfar, then!"

"Why not?"

"Twice, do you have to go on and on and on?" I tried to keep my voice calm. "It seems to me that people are losing sight of certain aspects of this Monica situation — especially you and Mattha. *He* knew about her carrying-on with you and was extremely mean-minded about it while it was going on, but now he has swung round and talks about her as if she were a misunderstood angel. It doesn't seem to occur to either of you that I am being damned reasonable with her. Most women in my place would have told her a thing or two by now—"

"Don't talk like an idiot!" Twice broke in. "You are *not* most women, whatever that may mean. In point of fact it would be better if you *did* tell Monica a thing or two — whatever *that* may mean. Why don't you?"

I glared at him. "I don't know. That's just the trouble — I don't know what I want to tell her. I have never been in such a muddle in my life about anything. It would be conventional, I suppose, for me to haul off and tell her to clear out of here, out of my life, that I never want to speak to her again and a lot of stuff like that. But it wouldn't be — true."

"True?"

"No. It wouldn't give me any satisfaction. If it would, I'd have done it long ago. There is something in the whole situation that seems to me to go deeper than that, something that

a conventional blazing row between two women about a man won't satisfy."

"You are sure you are not just shrinking from the idea of a row about a man, as you put it? You are not the type that fights about that sort of thing, you know."

"I know. But it isn't that. No. It's not just that I don't want a row. After all, Monica and I could separate without the actual disgusting vulgar mechanics of a row. No. It's not so simple as that. It goes deeper," I repeated.

"I think you should invite her to Reachfar," said Twice. "Edna! I want to go to New York for Christmas!" I snapped. "I'll do nothing of the sort! I don't *want* her at Reachfar, I tell you! Why *should* I have her there?"

"All right, Flash. Leave it. But I don't like to see you unhappy like this. But leave it. . . . Come for a walk up the hill before supper. Dram! Where's that hill-climbing, burn-paddling-in, rabbit-catching dog?"

Dram came galloping round the house and we went for a walk up the hill.

elings were darned if I was going to ask her to come. Indeed, I was prepared to treat Monica as if all that had appened while I was ill had never happened at all, except for this one thing. I was not going to invite her to Reachfar not, ever, again. So, in this state of deadlock, time passed until it was the evening before we were due to make the ourney.

The weather was still bright and hot, and Loose and Daze were in the kitchen making jam while the rest of us were out in the garden beside the burn. The Slaters and Sir Andrew had called in and Twice and Mattha had gone into the house to bring out some drinks, and Dram was standing in the burn in about four inches of water, with his mouth hanging open and looking, on the whole, extremely silly.

"Come out of there, you fool!" I said to him.

He went on panting and did not move.

"He's washin' his feet afore he goes fur his holidays," said Mattha, arriving with a tray of glasses. "He's near as wyce as masel'."

"Have you washed your feet yet?" Monica inquired.

"No' yit, but Ah'll dae it the nicht. Whit are ye for, Mrs Slater? We've got limmonade an' beer an' a little o' the Article."

Mrs Slater accepted some lemonade and said: "I wish I was going up with you. Maybe it'll be cooler up there. My, but's been a hot summer!"

"It will be lovely at Reachfar," Monica said. "Probably just as hot as here, but it's not so humid and far more pleasant."

"Are you going north too?" Mr Slater asked her as Twice went round the whisky glasses with a jug of water. He was standing beside Monica, the jug poised over the glass she was holding towards him."

"No," she said. "At least, I don't think so."

There was a second of silence after she spoke, and then Twice put some water into her glass and came over to pour water for me. I had a lonely sort of feeling suddenly, the kind of feeling that when I was a child I used to describe to myself as 'an Ishmael', a feeling of lonely separateness from the world, of isolation within a heavy black cloud. The longer the friendly talk around me went on, the more pro-

nounced became the feeling, so that by bedtime I had about me an Ishmael like a ton of black cotton-wool and I sat at my table, brushing my hair and glowering at myself in the looking-glass, while Twice said goodnight to Dram in his bed in the passage. In the glass I saw Twice come into our room and close the door, but I could not speak. (A major Ishmael makes you dumb – it is one of the ways that it cuts you off from communion with your kind.) Twice sat down on the bed, took off his shoes and socks and sat wriggling his toes for a moment before he came over to stand behind me.

“Flash, will you do something for me?”

“Of course. What?”

“You shouldn’t promise until you know what it is.”

“Don’t be silly. What is it?”

“I want you to invite Monica to come with us to Reachfar.”

I felt cold now, as well as black and ugly. I laid down my hairbrush very carefully.

“Why?”

“I don’t think I can tell you why. I don’t think I know why. I am just asking you if you will please invite her.”

“I don’t see why I should.”

“I am just asking you to invite her.”

“But, Twice, I don’t *want* to! You know that!”

“I know. But I am asking you to invite her.”

“You won’t tell me why?”

“I don’t know why.”

I looked into his mirrored face and rose. “All right, I will.”

“Now?”

“Now. She won’t be in bed yet.”

I walked out of the room, along the passage and into Monica’s Ben-the-Hoose. I did not want to do this, but Twice wished me to do it, so I would do it. Monica was standing in the middle of her bedroom in a white cami-knicker with large pink polka dots all over it.

“Hello,” she said.

“Hello. Monica, I just had an idea. Why don’t you come to Reachfar with us and then Loose and Daze can have their jam-making orgy all on their own?”

“Why, Janet—”

Suddenly she seemed very small, alone and naked – all

the Loame armour had disappeared and only the absurd pink polka dots seemed to be between her and the world.

"What about it?" I asked.

"I'll love to! Thank you, Janet, very, very much."

"We start at seven," I said. "Goodnight, now."

When I got back to our bedroom the Ishmael was blacker and thicker than ever, because of the way that Monica had looked at me and had said: "Thank you very, very much." And now Twice was looking at me too.

"She says she would like to come," I told him.

"Thank you very much for asking her, Flash," he said.

"Oh, I wish you would all stop *looking* and *thanking*!" I burst out. "What's the matter with you all, with all this intense rubbish about Reachfar? I don't care a damn if the whole Loame family comes up there and brings its Habsburg noses and all and holds one of its stinking committee meetings in the middle of the moor! I'm going to bed and you can all go boil yourselves!" I hurled my clothes at a chair, hurled myself into bed and pulled my thick, black Ishmael all in tight about me.

In the morning Twice, Mattha, Dram and I went first in our very old Bentley, the Garvins and Matthew came next in convoy in their large, smart, hired, chauffeur-driven limousine, and Monica brought up the rear in her Jaguar. My Ishmael was still upon me, but less intense in the morning breeze than it had been the night before and it was fairly easy to forget about it in the company of Mattha, who, in his best suit and stiff white winged collar, was sitting with Dram in the back seat and providing a running commentary on everything we passed. We stopped for our picnic lunch some way north of Perth, before tackling the long run over the moors through Aviemore to Inverness, and shortly after we started again Mattha leaned forward and tapped Twice on the shoulder.

"Are ye sure ye're on the richt road, lad?"

"Aye, Mattha. Why?"

"It's awfu' kin' o' eerie an' no' ceeveelized," said Mattha, looking about him uncomfortably. "Whit kin' o' folk could live here amang a' that heather an' hills an' a' them stanes?"

"Folk like Janet," said Twice.

"Aye? Mebbe it's nae wunner they're kin' o' diffrunt fae ord'nar' folk!"

"You'll like it better when we get further up, Mattha," Twice assured him.

"Weel, Ah wid hae muckle need tae!" said Mattha.

We stopped again a little way south of Inverness to drink some tea and to let Mattha and Dram stretch their legs again, and the other two cars came up and pulled in alongside of us.

"By the way," Twice said, "that in there" – and he pointed – "on the other side of the road, is Drumossie Moor where the Battle of Culloden was fought."

"Say," said Jim Garvin, "there ain't much of this country where you haven't had a fight at some time or another is there?"

"It's they danged Heilan' folk," Mattha commented. "They'd fecht wi' their ain shaddahs at the drap o' a hat an' aye aboot somethin' that ord'nar' folk widnae gee their ginger aboot."

"You Borderers aren't exactly men of peace either," Monica said. "We've got a picture at Beechwood of a bloke that looks exactly like Twice that was caught stealing cattle."

"I didn't know they made pictures of cattle-stealers," said Twice. "Not traditional treatment for a reiver, was it?"

"This wasn't a traditional reiver – or maybe he was. He was being held as a hostage, but he jumped into bed with my great-great-cousin about sixty times removed and ended up owning the Yorkshire property. Quite a character. Then he went over to Holland and got himself killed in a tavern brawl."

"Did he and your great-great-cousin have any children?" Martha asked in a practical way.

"Oh yes. Ten or eleven."

"And what happened to *them*?"

"Nothing much. They just went on. The present one, the head of the family, is that cove who is always asking questions in the House about foot-and-mouth disease and the excise laws. They are still interested in the same things – cattle and strong drink. . . . Well, Mattha, what do you think of the Highlands?"

"No' very much," said Mattha, lighting his pipe. "Scenery an' history. Iphm. Folk cannae get muckle o' a livin' oot o' scenery an' history. Although, mind ye, it's gey interestin'

tae think o' that pare sowl Prince Chairlie makkin' his last staun' jist ower the dyke there."

"I think Prince Charlie is just the most romantic thing!" said Martha. "And if I have a girl I'm going to call her Flora. I can't call the boy Charles because he'll have to be Ian the Fourth."

"Have *two* boys and then it'll be all right," Twice suggested.

"My, aren't you the brightest thing?" laughed Martha.

It should all have been very pleasant, relaxed and entertaining, but I did not feel in the least pleasant, relaxed or entertained, and when we were at last on the stony, uphill road that led up to Reachfar, the road that I had always hitherto travelled with such a joyous sense of journey's end, I felt actively gloomy and unhappy.

PART FIVE

AS USUAL, my father, my uncle, my aunt and Tom had seen the cars coming over the last four miles or so from the little back window of the scullery, the only window in the house which looks to the north, for, to get to Reachfar from the south, you have to go past it, as it were, and then turn back and make your climbing approach from the north side. As we arrived at the east gable of the granary the welcoming committee was there to meet us, with two collie bitches fanning their plumed tails round the feet of the people.

"Hello, everybody!" I called. "Hello, Fly! Hello, Moss! Dad, where's Fan?"

"I sent her down to Johnnie's at Lochside. She's in heat and I didn't want her spoilt with that yellow-coloured brute of yours."

"Bad luck, Dram!" said Twice, and Mattha cackled lewdly.

I jumped out of the car and ran towards my father and the others, but pulled up short at the sight of their faces. There was a moment of silence until my father said, "Aye, Janet. You're on the move again, right enough!" His voice was full of a quiet, thankful wonder that made me want to cry.

"I sometimes thought never to see her like that again," said my aunt and turned away to wipe her eyes.

The other cars came up the hill and came to a stop beside ours. I hated them all. Wrapped in my black Ishmael, I had forgotten that I was hobbling about on crutches the last time any of my family had seen me. I felt ashamed of myself, bitterly ashamed, and my world became darker than ever.

In the bustle of introductions and welcome and carrying of luggage and Dram taking a dislike to the turkey-cock whose like he had never seen before, I hoped that my black mood would pass unnoticed, and I think it did - except for Twice, of course. At bedtime, when the Garvins and Matthew had gone away with instructions to come up the next morning and everyone else had gone to bed under the crowded roof

of Reachfar, I knew that Twice was watching me covertly, but he did not say anything. And the next morning he did not say anything either, but went away, as soon as we had all had an early cup of tea, to look round the place with Mattha, Tom, my father and my uncle. This left my aunt, Monica and me all cosy together in the kitchen where my aunt was preparing breakfast. Monica began to help her, which I resented in a queer, ugly way, so I went out into the yard, and from there away on to the moor, where the dewy mist still hung among the fir trees, for it was only about seven in the morning as yet.

About a quarter of a mile from the house, above the spring-fed well which supplies our water, there is a place on the moor where the fir trees grow taller than in other places, and they are more closely ranked too, so close that the heather does not grow on the damp ground beneath them, which is covered, inches deep, soft and resilient, with a thick brown carpet of dried fir needles. This place has always been known to me as the Thinking Place, for, in its dim quietude, unvisited by birds and bees, there are no flowers or even grasses growing and nothing to ensnare a mind that can wander too easily from mundane things into the realms of enchantment. It was to the Thinking Place that I went this morning and sat down inside it, deep inside, on the fir-needle carpet.

I sat in there trying to be rational and reasonable and sensible and all these things which people try to be about their feelings and emotions and thereby waste their time. Words like 'rational and reasonable and sensible' do not apply to feelings and emotions, and feelings and emotions cannot be made to comply with their laws. Rational, reasonable and sensible are words for applying to things like the design of mass production lines and alimony agreements in the divorce courts and such things where emotions and feelings and most of what is valuable in humanity have been thrown out of the window.

This morning, in the Thinking Place, I no longer tried to escape from the thought of Monica. Instead, I tried to face it and the pain that it brought, for of course as soon as I faced the problem I discovered that Monica simply was not the person that I thought she had been. I do not think that anyone enjoys the realization that he has been wrong in an

estimate; or the discovery that he has been cheated over a period of years; or the knowledge that where he has given love and friendship it has been repaid with selfishness and disloyalty. The more I thought of what had happened, the greater became my feelings of resentment and hurt against Monica, and yet lurking behind these feelings was the thought that something was wrong. Somewhere in my chain of reasoning there was a false step, so that the conclusion was spurious. Monica was *not* like that. The Monica I had known since 1939 was neither selfish nor disloyal.

My mind, divided into two, argued with itself. On the one hand there was the factual record of what Monica had tried to do, and on the other hand there was – what? That was the difficulty. On this other hand, there was no factual record, there was nothing except some deep-rooted conviction of falseness in that factual record which existed. It was as if all that had happened were recorded on a balance sheet which showed a convincing statement of assets and liabilities – a balance sheet that any accountant would accept as a true and accurate record – and yet, for no reason of a logical kind, I had, looking at it, a deep conviction of falsity. The more I studied it, the deeper the conviction became; and the deeper it became, the more illogical I felt; and the more illogical I felt, the angrier with myself – and, of course, with Monica – I became. Round and round in circles I went, to come back again and again to the same point – this thing that had happened was simply not in character with the Monica I had known. Either I had been utterly wrong in my estimate of her or some unknown factor was at work.

It is easy to be wrong about people. In fact, people are the hardest things in the world to be right about. At least that is what I think, although I know that plenty of people will say that they knew So-and-So was Such-and-Such the very moment they laid eyes on him. I do not have that sort of eyes. Probably, in her own words, I had been quite wrong about Monica.

I had gone back to the beginning and was going over all that had happened for perhaps the tenth time when: "Flash!" Twice's voice called. "Are you in there?"

I hesitated for a moment before calling back.

"I brought out some breakfast. Want any?"

"Yes, please. Come on in."

He came through between the trees with his basket, dodging the low-spreading branches. "Gosh, it's hot already. When we came back and you were out, I asked for the basket, but I made a wrong guess and went to the picnic pond first." Twice knew most of my private places on Reachfar. "You must go to the pond," he said, bringing scones and butter and boiled eggs and tea out of his basket and laying them down on the brown carpet. "It is like Wordsworth's lake, only it's a crowd, a host of double-buttercups that won't scan. . . . Been having yourself a nice think?"

"No. Not very nice."

"Two eggs for you and two for me. Do you know why a black hen is cleverer than a white one?"

"No. Why?"

"A black hen can lay a white egg and a white hen can't lay a black one. An old man who was a mole-catcher taught me that when I was four."

"I once skinned some moles," I told him, "and tried to cure the skins to make me a fur tippet, but they got very stinking and Tom had to bury them."

"So it wasn't a nice think?" Twice said, making a tidy job of peeling an egg. "Listen, I have been thinking too."

"Oh?"

"Yes. Has it crossed your mind that you and I are a little unpopular around here?"

"Here? What on earth do you mean?"

"Just that." Twice frowned at his egg. "You haven't had any time with the family yet, but, take it from me, you and I are in the doghouse."

"But what for?"

"I have no idea. And also, forbye and besides, as Tom would say, a very queer thing is going on."

"What?"

"The power company is running electric light into Reachfar and Monica is putting up the money."

"You're demented!" I said. "You've got things all wrong. The family would never do a thing like that! They have never borrowed a shilling in their lives, even for a necessity, and they would never do it for what they term a luxury. . . . Please pass me that second egg."

"I didn't say anything about borrowing. Listen. Monica

s giving them a present of the electric light, to quote your father verbatim, and when I raised my eyebrows a little when he said it, it was then that it was finally borne in on me that you and I were in the doghouse."

"Why?"

"Look, Flash, it's no good glowering at *me* like that. . . . Your father said to me: 'And I want you to mind, lad, that this is between Monica and us and is no business of yours or Janet's either'."

"Let's pack up this basket," I said. "I'm going back to the house. That brat Monica is going a lot more than a little too far."

Trembling, I began to hurl the remains of our breakfast into the basket.

"Listen, Flash, go easy!" said Twice.

"Easy! Holy blistering cow! Who does Reachfar belong to, anyway? Or you? Or me? Or the Sandisons? Or are we just a remote villeinage of the manor of the Loames? Come on!"

The blood was singing in my head as I marched – literally marched – across the moor back to the house. An hour ago, if anyone had asked me, I would have said that I was a fairly civilized being and that all that stuff about your feet being on your native heath was what Martha would call 'a lotta hooey'. But for me it is not. Out of some dark abyss of time there rose up through that heather and moss from that boggy, infertile ground, into me, a blood-and-soil rage as inflamed and senseless, as lustful and remote from reason as anything that ever caused a clansman to wave his claymore round his head and shout: "Christ! And no quarter!"

It all came, of course, to a crashing anticlimax. My rushes of blood to the head – my big moments when I feel immense – invariably do. I am the sort, by fate, that if, like Juliet, I tried to take a phial of poison, the apothecary would have sold me an emetic by mistake. That is why, if I stop to think at all, I try to avoid big moments. I have a haunted feeling that they are not in my stars. So, expecting to find a houseful of people sitting round the breakfast table and spoiling for a scene that would shake the roof-tree, all I found when I got to the house was my aunt, alone in the kitchen, baking scones in huge quantity. I felt like a deflated balloon and had just as little air in me.

"Where's everybody?" I asked, on a dying note due to the emptiness of my lungs.

"The whole boiling lot of them is off to Inverness," she said, "Tom and all, cocked up in the front of the car beside the chauffeur with his Sunday suit on like an old laird. Where have you been? Up among the heather gawping about you like a crow, I suppose. You know, Twice, when she was a bairn there was times when we would be thinking she wasn't all in it – the way she would spend hours up there in the moor, all on her lone, just looking about her."

"Never mind that now," I said. "They tell me you are getting the electric light?"

My aunt became quite still, her floury hands suspended over the baking-board. "Yes, Janet," she said after a moment and squared her shoulders.

I had a curious sensation that I was looking at an older edition of myself in fighting fettle. I had often been told that I resembled my grandmother, my aunt, my father, my uncle, but I always accepted these remarks as the things that people say to make conversation and never attached much significance to them. We are a tall family and well enough built and put together, but these things are commonplace among Highland people. Our men are not specially handsome, nor are our women startlingly beautiful, but maybe Twice is fairly accurate when he says that there is nothing reach-me-down about us and that we have the distinction of line that belongs to a garment made by a good tailor. My aunt is one of the most beautiful of our women of this recent generation, and at this moment looked very decisively outlined indeed, not only in face and body, but also in mind and spirit.

"Quite a revolution at Reachfar!" I said, deliberately provocative, lighting a cigarette and tossing the spent match at the fireplace so it fell on the whitened hearth, a thing that my aunt loathed.

"Aye," she said, picking up the match and putting it in the fire, "and Reachfar will take it kindly if you'll be civil to the lassie that's giving it to us."

"Oh yes, of course!" I said in an affected way. "I think it's jolly decent of her! I'll remember to thank her and be ever so grateful. And you will have to remember, too, to behave like the grateful tenantry!"

That did it. She laid down the rolling-pin with exaggerated care, wiped her hands on her apron, squared her shoulders again and faced me over the table.

"She didn't want me to tell you," she said ominously quietly, and turned to Twice, "nor you either. She said it was something that should be left alone." She turned back to me. "But I didn't make any promises and I am not going to leave it alone. Now, just you listen to me. God alone knows what the lot of you down at Ballydendran and that daft family of hers did to that lassie, but may God himself forgive you for it, for I'm not finding it easy. If you had been here the night she fell out of that car of hers out there, I would have sorted you, my lady!"

"Fell out of her car?" I asked, and Twice and I both subsided on to chairs at the side of the table.

"Surely - at ten o'clock at night. George had to go right off to Achraggan for Doctor Mackay." She suddenly narrowed her eyes and looked at us in a different way. "You didn't know how sick she was? She hasn't told you anything?"

"No! Sick?" said Twice.

"She hasn't told us *anything*!" I almost shouted. "She just came back to Crookmill and said she'd had a fine holiday. What was wrong with her?"

"What they call a nervous breakdown - she was nearly off her head. I thought she would have told you by now - but no." Her voice hardened again. "No. She didn't want you to know - she tried to get me to promise that I wouldn't say anything to you, but—"

"Never mind that now," I said. "We can have a row about it afterwards if you like, but tell us what happened first."

She glared at me, drew a long breath and visibly quelled her anger. "I don't understand these kind of illnesses, but we were very lucky. Doctor Mackay has young Alasdair home and in the practice now, and Alasdair got a man from the Air Force base who is a kind of nerve specialist or something to help him with her and we - your father and George and Tom and I - we just did what they told us. . . . What did you do to her down there among you?"

"We didn't do *anything*!" I said.

"Her family, then?"

"What do you mean, *do to her?*" Twice asked.

"Well," my aunt rounded on him belligerently, "if you didn't do anything to her, why was she so frightened that you two and her family might find out where she was?"

"I don't know," I said.

She narrowed her eyes at us again suspiciously. "Well, neither do I," she said drily, and then took thought again for a moment. "Mind you, Alasdair and the Air Force man said that it was maybe just a notion she had about being so frightened of you all. They said that when people get into that state they imagine things, but I never believed that, somehow. There must have been *some* reason why she was so frightened. You'll swear to me for certain sure that none of you were bad to her down there?"

"Well, she and I used to have the odd argument at the works—" Twice began.

"Och, it wasn't a little thing like that — this was some big, hurtful sort of badness — and it wasn't about *you*, anyway, lad. No, it was about *this one* here." She jerked a hand towards me. "It was aye 'Don't tell Janet!' and 'Don't let Janet know!' and 'Janet must hate me!' and sometimes it was 'Don't tell Mama!', but it was mostly about Janet." My aunt swung round on me. "I know fine, my lady, that you can be a wicked thrawn limmer when it comes up your back — now, for the last time, **WHAT DID YOU DO TO THAT LASSIE?**"

"Aunt Kate, I swear to you that I didn't do anything at all."

"She didn't, you know, Kate," Twice added.

"Well, I have to believe you both. But I was certain sure you had done something terrible to that wee craitur. . . . Well, maybe Alasdair and the Air Force doctor were right after all. Maybe it was all just notions that she had."

"How long did this notion business go on?" I asked.

"Och, for about ten days. Then one day she looked up at me when I took in her breakfast — we had a devil of a job getting her to eat for the first while — and she said: 'I suppose I have been making the hell of a fool of myself?' You know that way she has of speaking? So I said, Aye, that was so, but we were all fools sometimes — Alasdair said not to cross her at all — and I told her to come now and eat her breakfast for me like a clever bairn. That's how she was, just

like a bairn, a lost bairn. So she gave me that look of hers – you know how she does, out of the tail of her eye – and after that she got better every day. But it took a while for her to let your father tell you in a letter that she was here. She said: ‘Janet will be angry, and she’ll be quite right. But we kept saying that that was nonsense and that we wouldn’t let you be angry, and in the long run she gave in about it. But I got a fright when that telegram came in from you, but when she read it she seemed quite pleased and happy and then she went off south to see her father. . . . It’s funny that she never told you she was sick.’

My aunt was still inclined to regard me with suspicion.

“Monica is funny in lots of ways,” I said defensively.

“Aye. That’s true too,” she agreed thoughtfully and began to work at her baking again. “Of course, these fine-bred sort of folk – they’re not like the rest of us. Still, your father and George and me – we were all gey angry at you two, letting her get into a state like that.”

“But, honestly, we didn’t *know*!” Twice protested.

“It’s all very queer, but I have to believe you both,” she said at last. “And then, of course, she took this notion about the electricity and nothing would do but she would get her own way – she can be as thrawn as yourself, Janet, when she makes up that red-headed little mind of hers. She felt that we had been good to her when she was sick – as if anybody could have turned her away from the door that night she came in here – and I know what it is like when folk won’t let you thank them. So I just told your father and George and Tom that the right thing to do was to take what she was offering to us in the spirit it was being offered.”

“I think you were perfectly right, Kate,” I said. “I am sorry I was wicked about it to start with.”

“I don’t blame you for being wicked about it when you didn’t know the reason.”

“Monica won’t notice the cost of it,” I continued, knowing that at last she had accepted my innocence of being ‘bad’ to Monica. “And it will be a wonderful thing for you all here, especially in the winter. Are you getting an electric cooker?”

“Your father and George are giving me one. It will be very handy on the cold winter mornings to get a cup of tea in a hurry. And Tom has lifted five pounds out of the Post Office to buy me an iron.”

"Crikey! I bet the Post Office got a shock! Tom has never taken out a penny in his life!"

"That's not true," my aunt said. "He lifted five pounds when you went to the university to help with your books. You didn't need it, but he'd always said he'd do it and he did it."

"Did he? I never knew that."

"He didn't want you to know – but it's an old story now. . . . And when I get a run to Inverness myself I am going to buy myself something I've aye wanted."

"What's that Kate?" Twice asked. "A lamp to sit beside my bed with a fancy shade on it. A pink shade. That's a fine thing – to be as old as me and be getting something you've always wanted for thirty years. Every time I've put out that stinking candle at night I've thought on a nice electric lamp with a fancy shade. I've hated the stink of candles and paraffin since I was a bairn, and when the lights come in I think I'll take all these rotten old lamps outside and take the hammer on them!" she ended with spirit.

"No," said Twice, "don't do that – we can wire them, you know."

"To burn electric instead of paraffin?"

"Yes."

"Well, we'll see." When my aunt has a spite at anything she takes a deal of convincing that it can be improved in any way. "I'm still going to have the wee new one with the fancy shade for beside my bed, though."

Twice and I left her to her baking and retired to the granary stairs, where we sat in the sun and stared out across the broad landscape.

"Well," I said, "things are starting to sort themselves out."

"But I wonder why she didn't tell us she had been ill?"

"I don't know."

"You know what I think, Flash? I think maybe the whole carry-on with me was part of the illness. That would explain the queer, unnatural feeling I had about it. And another thing, I think that maybe the illness was partly your fault and mine – especially mine."

"Why."

"Look at it this way. You went and fell over the bridge and, to put it briefly, the whole boiling of us at Crookmill lost our heads. The first few weeks were pure hell. The doctors couldn't tell us what had happened – they knew a

bit of your spine and a bit of your joints were broken — they couldn't find any broken bones round your neck or your skull, but the awful thing was that they didn't know, and had no means of telling, whether certain nerves were actually severed or whether the immobility came from bruising, shock or what-have-you. It was a nightmare. For days we did not know whether you would be able to see or speak—"

"You mean, I might have been a drooling idiot?"

"I was told that there was a definite risk that you might be completely helpless. Then one day you said: 'Hell!' quite quietly, just like that, and then you moved your right hand and opened your eyes and one knew that you could see. You can imagine what happened."

"I can't imagine any of it," I said.

"You know by this time the kind of fool I am — I had to let off steam somehow. I ramped round the house, hugging everybody and everything — the nurses, Dram, Loose and Daze, the Animated Bust and, of course, Monica. . . . Yes, I did. . . . Although I knew that Monica had indecent notions in her mind that I had been laughing off for weeks and we had been doing nicely, I forgot all about that. I wasn't thinking of Monica at all — I was thinking about nothing but you — and myself, of course — so Monica got the whole hoop. When I look back on it, I was impossible. Every time you made a little improvement, I would go demented and finish up, as often as not, bawling salt tears on Monica's shoulder. One forgets these things, because one *wants* to forget them. Loose and Daze never came in for it — it was always Monica. And I know why now."

"Why?"

"Because, actually, she has a capacity for sympathy similar to yours. She was genuinely as pleased and thankful as I was about every improvement you made. You *must* believe that. That was why she was able, practically, to keep me sane, Flash. If she hadn't been there I don't know what might have happened." He paused and then went on: "She is very like you in so many ways. She has the same sympathy and generosity of feeling and patience and steadfastness — it is difficult to explain that, in spite of everything, her loyalty to you and her love for you never faltered. Every time you made a little step forward, she was as pleased —"

"I know that is true," I said, remembering. "She was there

with me the night that the first muscle moved in my leg. I think she was even happier than I was. You had prepared me for it by making me believe that it would happen, but Monica was taken by surprise and – yes, she was genuinely pleased. . . . Yes, I can see the strain she was under, and I can see how it could all lead to a breakdown, but what I *still* cannot understand or accept, Twice, is her pursuit of *you*. You said it started almost as soon as she came to Ballyden-dran – before I was ill?”

“Yes. It did.”

“And now?”

“Since she came back – that night of Martha’s party – she has been perfectly normal, the little I have seen of her. It is as if the whole thing had never happened except that – tacitly – she admits that it did. I don’t pretend to understand that part of it.”

“You are sure she has no – feeling of that kind now?”

“Certain.” Twice was embarrassed, and so was I, as if we were conscious of discussing an indecency. “One *can* be certain. It was such a blatant, obscene sort of thing that if it were there still I would feel it – I am sure of that. Let’s not talk about it any more. Let’s just go canny and see what happens. . . . This morning, by the way, when the lighting project was sprung on me; I offered to do the wiring of the place.” He grinned at me. “Being conscious of being somewhat unpopular, I thought it might help to recover us in the family graces. Will you give me a hand? All the cable and switches and stuff are in a crate in the barn.”

I rose from my seat on the steps. “We might as well start. Come on.” We walked along the yard to the barn. “I have raked about and thought and cogitated about Monica in this rubbish heap I call my mind until I don’t know where I am. A practical job will be just the thing. Let’s concentrate on this wiring.”

In the initial stages the wiring involved a lot of climbing about and measuring, and, naturally when Twice and I were involved in it, argument. Twice, as must be obvious by now, has a lot of patience with me about most things, but when we do any constructional or engineering job together, and I am singularly ungifted in these ways, he has not any patience at all. He is not even reasonable. When I measure something and say: “Seven feet eight inches and a wee bit,” he gets

angry out of all proportion and bellows: "And what the hell size is a wee *bit*?"

When the two cars came back from Inverness we were still clambering about among the rafters of the barn, accompanied by the two cats who lived up there when Dram was at Reachfar, and as we were now at the stage of quarrelsomeness when we were hardly speaking to one another I was glad to give my end of the steel tape to Jim Garvin. Like every other thoughtless action one perpetrates, this led to the Garvins staying at the local hotel until the wiring job was completed and they did not go to John o' Groats until nearly a month later.

However, on this afternoon when I came out of the dusty dimness of the barn into the sunlight Monica's Jaguar and the Garvin's smart black saloon looked like those cars that commercial travellers use, with odd-shaped packages sticking out all over them, and the young chauffeur from Glasgow was untying some rope that held a white-enamelled electric cooker half-inside and half-outside his big luggage boot.

"I have the contrivance for to be ironing the clothes!" Tom told my aunt. "Canny, now! It's heavier than you might be thinking."

"And this is from Jim," said Martha, struggling with a long, untidy package, taller than herself, and a large cardboard box.

"Mercy me! What is it?" my aunt asked.

"Come inside and open it and see!" said Monica.

The standard lamp with its big parchment shade was unpacked and set up and everyone was dumb with admiration.

"And here's the cooking thing," said my uncle, helping the chauffeur and my father to carry it in. "There, lad. Just in this corner. That's fine."

"And this is from me," said Martha, and began to unpack and set up on the table what must be the pinkest, frilliest, fanciest-shaded, bedside lamp in the world. "It's for you, Auntie, for your bedroom."

My aunt sank onto the nearest chair and stared at it like a child at its first Christmas tree. It is the only time that I have ever consciously wished that I were as wealthy as My Friend Martha. If I were, I would go around looking for middle-aged women like my aunt, sturdy, sensible women, who had made do with candles all their lives, hating the

smell of them night and morning, and I would give them all electric lamps with frilly, fancy, pink shades – or blue, if blue was their favourite colour.

"Well, Mattha," I said, "what do you think of Inverness now?"

"It's a real bonnie wee toon when ye see it richt," said Mattha, "wi' the river an' a' the suspension brigs an' the folk a' speakin' English-like, like the folk here. The shops is a bit backward, compared wi' Glesca, but that's tae be expeckit. Here, whaur's yon parcel o' mines, Matt?"

"Here it is," said Monica, handing him a large, square package.

"There ye are, Mistress – these is fae Matt an' me," he said, handing the package to my aunt. "The yin Ah hae to hame is bigger nor they yins, but they're better nor nothin'."

With wonder, my aunt unpacked four cylindrical bakelite objects.

"What's that things?" my father inquired.

"Bed warmers," said Monica, "and a hell of a job we had getting them, too." She was ripping the paper off another square package as she spoke. "And this is strictly non-electrical. Let's have some water, Aunt Kate, and let's all have a noggin. I need it."

"Here, ye wee bizzom," said Mattha. "Hoo mony bottles did ye manage tae cadge roon' Inverness?"

"You mind your own business."

"An' an auld man wi' the rheumatics like me cannae get even a hauf-mutchkin o' the Article when Ah'm needin' it!" As he spoke, Twice and Jim came into the kitchen and Mattha transferred his acid remarks to them with: "Aye, so yees smelt it, did yees?"

"Holy cow!" said Twice. "Are you going into the electrical business?"

"Look at my lampie for beside my bed!" said my aunt.

"Monica," I said quietly in a corner by the dresser, "it is very kind of you to have made all this possible for my people and—"

"Kind?" she said, with a hard, bright look. "Oh no, I am never kind."

She moved away from me with her whisky bottle and began to pour into the glasses which Twice was setting in a long line on the dresser, leaving me firmly snubbed in my

I am thinking that you will all travel a long way before you see another house that has been lit by nothing except the kindness of its friends. That's all." He raised his glass and drank and then turned away to light his pipe.

"Gee!" said Martha. "That was so cute I wanna cry!"

"Well, don't!" said Monica harshly, "or you'll all start bawling."

She turned away. "Mattha, lend me your matches, you mean old devil!"

The chauffeur snapped a highly efficient lighter for her cigarette and everybody began to talk at once, while my aunt worked off her emotion by bustling about, picking up boxes, brown paper and string.

It was a between-season time at Reachfar, for the hay was in and the harvest was not yet on, so that my father and my uncle and Tom had leisure time, especially as they were now reducing their cultivation and had rented off several fields to their younger, wealthier neighbour on the west march. They sat about with Mattha, smoking their pipes, while Matthew, Jim and Twice went on with the wiring and Monica, Martha and I helped my aunt with the meals and the washing up. The line of little pylons was now marching across the moor at a great rate and Twice had applied to Ballydendran for some more of his backlog of leave, which had been granted. It was continuously fine weather and Reachfar was at its smiling best and everybody was gloriously happy and – all that was how it seemed on the frothy surface.

"What an extraordinary gaggle of people we are here, when you think of it!" Monica said suddenly one evening when she, Martha and I were sitting on a gate smoking. "If you read about us in a book you wouldn't believe it."

"That's what's wrong with books," said Martha.

"How d'you mean, wrong?"

"They're supposed to be believable. Real things aren't, quite often."

"Maybe you're right at that," Monica agreed.

"If any book had told me that the best bit of my trip to Europe was being right here on this gate, I'd have said it was a lotta hooey," said Martha. "Just fancy goin' all that ways to Europe to sit on a gate, I'd have said. Of course, I don't go much on books, anyways."

"Why not?" I asked.

"Oh, I *read* them," she said, "but I never believe them. I took against them when I was about seven."

"Why?"

"Cinderella and the glass slippers – expecting anyone to believe that a girl could dance in glass slippers. No, for me books are strictly for the birds. Ian says I'm illiterate. Maybe I am. But the way I look at it is, history isn't books. History is the real thing, and although some of it is kinda hard to believe – your old Queen Elizabeth that had the Armada, now *she* takes a bit of believing when you look at her face and read about her beaux – but you know where you're at with it. You just *gotta* believe it, because it *happened*. But when I was at college we had a literary society and it was kinda snob to be a member so I go and get myself mixed up in it and we get to reading a book by some French guy – it was translated into English, of course – all about how he felt when he woke up in the morning and how he felt about some guy he knew and how it came over him when he saw some old dame in the street—"

"Marcel Proust?" Monica asked.

"That's the guy! How did you know? Anyways, I just said to myself: This ain't believable and it ain't any fun, and why did he write it, anyways? So I retired from the literary society and started going to the cookery classes. . . . Anybody got another cigarette?" Monica gave her one. "Thanks. Not that I have anything against this Proust guy personally. But I don't feel like that in the morning or about the guys I know or in the street, and I'm not specially interested in a guy who *does* feel that way so why read books about it? Now, if I could get a book that tells about how I feel sitting right here on this gate, I would read it. That would be worth reading and it would be believable, too."

"The only snag is," Monica said, "that *you* would have to write it."

"Who are you kidding?" Martha jumped off the gate. "There's Auntie going to put the baby chicks to bed. I'm just crazy about that old hen and these chicks."

She ran away down the yard, and through narrowed eyes Monica watched her go.

"There goes a highly individual attitude to literature," I said.

"Highly," said Monica.

She then slid from the gate and walked away from me into the house.

The days were full of little incidents like this. In the main people worked or sat around in groups of three or four, the women attending to the household duties, the younger men occupied with the wiring, the older men coalescing naturally into a group of their own, but in the evenings, when these groups shifted or merged, I noticed that Monica would sit with or go for a walk with any one member of the Reachfar community except myself. During the working part of the day, too, I noticed, the natural trend of the housework was to leave me in the kitchen with my aunt while Monica and Martha made beds and attended to other parts of the house, and Monica made sure that she and I were never alone together.

My family, an observer would say (and the observer would be quite right), are simple sons and daughters of the soil, but a thing that I have noticed about simple sons and daughters of the soil is that they are amazingly and awkwardly perceptive and can arrange to make you aware of what they perceive without recourse to the use of words. My aunt and, in a slightly less virulent degree, my father were bending upon me looks that mingled contemplation and suspicion and were obviously reverting to the opinion that at Ballydendran I had been 'bad to' Monica. The air daily seemed to me to become more dense with their disapproval and displeasure, until I decided that the only thing to do was what, mentally, I refer to as 'bringing up the heavies', which is my private description for taking the advice of my Uncle George.

My Uncle George holds, and has always held, a curious position in the family. Between him and my father there is only about a year of age, but most people who know the Sandisons will tell you of Duncan Sandison - or 'Reachfar' as he is frequently called - and having described this man and his croft in some detail, they will probably tell you that he has a daughter 'down in the south' or that his widowed sister keeps the house of Reachfar or some other little thing and then they will add, very much as an unimportant afterthought: "Oh, aye, and there's a younger brother, George, that gives him a bit hand about the place. To all appearances George has always been the satellite of my father, the

devoted follower of my father, a nice, kindly fellow enough and very comical when he feels like it, but 'not the man that Reachfar is, och, no!' This is, however, precisely where people who think they know the Sandisons are quite wrong. George is the devoted brother of my father, but he is no satellite of anyone, no mere shadow of another man's thought and will. He is a highly original thinker and a keen observer who chooses to screen the originality and the keenness behind a mask of clownish foolery. People who 'know' the Sandisons would be amazed to know, as the Sandisons know, that George, in many ways, has a hundred times the intelligence and sharpness of wit of the big brother of whom he has always been the devoted 'second string' and admirer.

My uncle differs from my father and my aunt – and, indeed, from most people – in that he thinks but gives no judgments, observes but passes few opinions, and believes so firmly and absolutely in the human right of freewill and self-determination that it is easier, on the whole, to draw blood from a stone than to obtain advice from him, so I was very gratified one morning at breakfast when he said: "You wouldna care for a right good long walk the-day, Janet?"

In his eyes there was the look of ancient mischief that had often been there when I was a child when he was speaking to me in front of the rest of the family and contriving to convey a message that was private to us two.

"I might," I said, showing no undue enthusiasm. "Where to?"

"Up over the moor to Greycairn."

"That's fourteen miles before you get back! Are you daft?" my aunt asked. "Janet can't walk like that nowa-days."

"Ach, if a poor old done craitur like me can do it," said my vigorous straight-backed uncle, "I thought maybe she would manage if we took our time."

"I'd like it fine, George," I said. "I haven't been up to Greycairn for years. What are we going for?"

"To buy a few lambs," said my father and turned to George. "And tell Johnnie that if they're not down here within a week he can keep them. If there's a lazier man alive than young Johnnie Greycairn, I've yet to come across him."

"If Janet comes up, we'll bring the lambs home with us," George said.

We walked the rough six-odd miles to Greycairn through the bright sunshine where the larks rose singing round us, in an atmosphere that was as intimate, on the surface, as that between two chance travellers in a railway carriage but which, in its depths, had the strange intimacy of blood and family mind. Monica's name had not been mentioned, but I had come to know before we were the first hundred yards on our way that George and I were out here alone on the moor because of Monica and that, now, all I had to do was to await his chosen moment. It came when we were about two miles back on the way to Reachfar, with the flock of lambs, attended by Moss and Fly, spread in a white mass in front of us. He gave a long whistle on a falling note and the two collies went wide of the flock and lay down among the heather and tussocky grass and the white mass lost urgency as the lambs began to nibble at the pasture. George sat down on a convenient boulder and took out his pipe.

"Ay, a bonnie enough few lambs," he said, and looked away to the hump of Ben Wyvis in the western distance. "Janet, I'm sorry for that lassie Monica."

I said nothing, and for a moment the silence was broken only by the nibbling of the lambs at the grass.

"Your father and Kate," he continued, clearing the ground, "will have it that you and Twice did something to her that time before she was sick, but that's chust an idea they've got and it's nothing like that that's wrong with her. The thing that is wrong is something in herself. . . . I heard a song on the wireless once - ye hear a wonderful amount of foolishness on the wireless one way and another although it's a fine entertainment in the wintertime. I thought at the time that this song was chust about the foolishest thing I had ever heard, but now I'm not so sure." He paused to light his pipe and after he had burned three matches down to his fingers he went on: "Aye. This song was called 'Poor Little Rich Girl'. Aye. I can kind of understand it. I wouldna get the same pleasure out of taking that puckle lambs home if it didna matter one way or the other if we had them at Reachfar or not. But the wintering for them is there and we have to use it. But with Monica it is not chust the money alone. The money would be nothing to worry about if she was foolish, like so many folk that have too much money. If she was like that daft ould craitur over at Dunlochy that spends a fortune

not think in the heroic verse of the Shakespearian soliloquy. Not me. My mind explodes like an erupting volcano and throws up smoke, flames and boulders and lava in the form of a series of disjointed petty curses and slang phrases: "God dammit! Wicked? Who's wicked to whom? What have I done? Did I chase Twice round Birmingham in a pink satin—"

"Listen, George," I said, pushing a large bung I have for the purpose into the crater of the volcano inside me. "I think everybody has an exaggerated idea of my importance to Monica. What I think or feel doesn't matter a tinker's cuss to Monica. It never has. Why should it? In her life I am very small fry. I liked *her*, of course. For me, she had all the glamour and strangeness of another world. She had all the brains and beauty I didn't have myself. But I have nothing to give *her*. It was just one of these war situations, our friendship. She was out of her own world and amused herself exploring my world for a bit. I agree that there's something wrong with her just now, but I don't think it turns on *me*, as you all seem to think."

"You are wrong, you know, Janet."

"Oh, for heaven's sake, let's take these lambs home!"

"You'll think about this, though?"

"Oh, I'll think about it!" I snapped and told myself that I was sick with thinking about it already.

George rose, whistled to the dogs, and the flock gathered in and began to move ahead and we followed them in silence over the moor until we came within sight of the gate above the house where Monica and Martha were sitting on the stile and chatting to two men with guns over their arms. George whistled to the dogs again and the flock stopped moving and began to drink at the pond. "You can be a thrawn brat," he said quietly. "I know that what she did on you is hard to get over, but she did not mean it. And you and your talk about your world and hers. That's a big part of what's wrong with the craitur — she *has* no world of her own. Janet, when you get the chance, when things are quieter here, you have to try and help her. Mind that, now."

I stared at him sulkily and defiantly. "Who are the two blokes at the gate?" I asked.

"You'll think on what I've said, Janet?"

I looked into his grizzled, ruddy face. "Yes. I will," I

agreed. He looked down towards the gate. "That's young Sir Torquil and young Alasdair, the doctor. They were up in the west fishing, but they must be back. They come round for a shot now and again when they have the time."

'Young Sir Torquil' was a man of about my own age, but I had never seen a great deal of him since my childhood, for I had been away from home and he had spent his life in the Army until he came home to take over the estate from his ageing father. I remembered, now, that the estate was not much of an inheritance, although when I was a child his father and mother had lived in the 'Big House of Poyntdale' and had been for me almost legendary figures of power, grandeur and beauty. When I was very small my father had been grieve to the old Sir Torquil, managing the home farm and helping to administer the large estate that lay to the north of us, and Lady Lydia, who was the daughter of an English duke, had had for me an unspeakable glamour, with her 'English' voice, her ash-blond hair that was so unlike the local dark or red hair and her dainty elegance of dress, especially on summer Sundays at church, when her weekday tweeds gave way to pastel chiffons, large beflowered hats and long white gloves with many small buttons. Those days were gone. This 'young' Sir Torquil had inherited only the cumbersome big house, its gardens and home farm, and was hard-pressed, I had heard, to hold even this together.

As I walked towards the group at the gate, with the flock of lambs rippling between us and them, I had a sudden nostalgia for the simple, well-ordered days of my childhood. I wished that I were eight years old again, and that the old Sir Torquil and Lady Lydia were standing there, for it had all been so natural and so easy to make my small curtsy of deference to rank before going on to answer the questions of my good, kindly neighbours as to my progress at school and the growth of my flock of ducklings.

"Going through with them, George?" Sir Torquil called to my uncle over the white backs of the lambs.

"Aye, Sir Torquil!" he called back and the two young men opened the gate.

"Say, these ain't *lambs*!" said Martha in a disapproving voice. "I been waiting here at this gate ever since I can see lambs come in and all that comes is these *fat* sheep!"

There was a sudden burst of laughter as George followed the flock down the yard to the gate to the Little Fieldie that my father was holding open.

"They are sheep now, Martha," I told her.

"Who are you telling? You said *lambs* this morning!"

"They were lambs as long as they stayed at Johnnie Greycain's, where they were born last spring, but from now on we'll be referring to them as sheep."

Martha stared at me belligerently. "Are you trying to tell me that these - these animals turned into sheep on the way home?"

"Psychologically, yes."

"Psychology, phooey! I don't go anywheres on psychology! For me, psychology is—"

"Strictly for the birds?" Monica put in helpfully.

"You said it!" said Martha, jumping down from her seat on the stile. "Lambs is lambs and sheep is sheep, that's what. I'm going in to help Auntie with the tea."

She ran down the yard, and as I shook hands with Sir Torquil and Alasdair I saw Monica walk slowly away down the yard after her. My father came up towards us at the gate.

"Good day, Reachfar," Sir Torquil said. "Big doings here these days. Your lights will soon be in, I see."

"Aye, Sir Torquil, lad. We're moving with the times. Get a shot the-day, Alasdair?"

They patted their game bags. "A brace or two. We'll come down and leave a few at the house."

"Kate'll be pleased. Come down to the house for a droppie tea whatever. . . . You've never met my son-in-law, Sir Torquil?"

The two ends of Scotland seemed to meet when Sir Torquil and Twice shook hands at the barn door, for they are both truly of their country, yet diametrically opposed in physical type. Sir Torquil is tall and rangy, with reddish-fair skin, hazel eyes and dark hair on a long head, although his moustache shows a glint of sandy red. Twice is stocky and compact, with a tanned skin, blue eyes and darkish brown hair on a round head above his thick neck.

At tea the talk ranged round the miracle of 'the lights coming in', which was my family's main interest, and at one point Sir Torquil said wistfully that he hoped to be able to make an installation at his farm the next year.

"What lighting have you now?" Twice asked.

"An old engine that my father installed at the big house about thirty years ago. I moved it to the farm when I closed the house, but it hardly ever works and I've given up spending money on it. There's not much wrong with it except age, but I'm such a fool with engines."

"Could I have a look?" Twice asked.

"I'd be delighted."

Twice drove down to Poyntdale the next morning, had his 'look', and the lighting plant, though sadly stricken in years, responded, and Sir Torquil also responded to the explanation he was given of its temperament. This resulted in Sir Torquil and his two children coming back to Reachfar that afternoon to tell us of their miraculous morning. The children had all the charm of their age. Lydia, a skinny hoyden of six years old with untidy pigtails, attached herself to Twice, Matt and Jim as they went on with their wiring job, got thoroughly in their way and talked incessantly, while Torquil, a solemn person aged five, went straight to Monica, laid a hand on her knee and stared up with wonder at her lovely face, speaking no word. As I watched them covertly, I thought that I should have found that silent, round-eyed stare embarrassing and disconcerting, that it would have forced me into speech or action, but not so Monica. Occasionally she would detach her attention from the general conversation to smile at the child, and when she rose to move from one place to another she would cover the hand that lay on her knee with her own hand for a second, but otherwise their communion was a silent one.

"You two get on very well together," I ventured to say when tea was over.

Monica looked at me without expression and then smiled at the boy.

"The wee master and Monica got on together from the very start," my aunt said. "Eh, Torquil?"

"She is my friend," Torquil said, "but not sick now."

"No, she is better now," my aunt agreed.

"And I can come again to see her?"

"But surely! You can come every day if you like. Isn't that so, Monica?"

"Yes. Every day," said Monica quietly.

This quietness was new, something which had

since we came up to Reachfar, and it was something I did not like, something which frightened me, something that I did not understand. It was like the unnatural quiet which precedes a thunderstorm, when even the birds have twittered themselves into an uneasy silence and the trees are still, with only a leaf moving here and there as if flicked by a ghostly, unseen hand. But the fear I felt was only momentary. There was too much going on at Reachfar these days, too strong an ebb and flow of people and events and impressions, so that Monica had too many ways of screening herself for me to get near enough to her to study her. When little Torquil was not attached to her limpet-like, Jim Garvin was taking her for evening walks and drives. When she was not making beds with Martha, she was helping my aunt to make butter or sitting in the barn listening to Tom's and Mattha's yarns of fifty years ago.

I am finding it difficult to reconstruct the happenings of this time in my memory without giving the impression that Monica dominated the scene. Such an impression would be false. It is true that she dominated my own thoughts and I was aware that George was observing her closely, but on the surface she and I were the good friends that we had always been, and among all the coming and going in our small community I think Monica went on her way without anything unusual in her coming to the general notice.

We had all been at Reachfar for four weeks to the day before 'the lights came in'. When I say four weeks, like that, I mean four cycles of from Saturday midnight to Saturday midnight, but this, though the commonly used method of computing time, really means very little. Four of those cycles in the Highlands of Scotland is quite a different thing from four of those cycles in a mass-production factory in the Midlands of England. Time at Reachfar has an Old Testament quality which leads one into phrases like 'and in the fullness of time' or 'at the time of the harvest' or 'in the time of Old Hughie the Molecatcher' or 'at the time when Granda's old Aunt Betsy was a lassie'. Time at Reachfar has the fullness of infinity and is not measured by days, weeks and months, but by events in the lives of the people, and the 'coming in of the lights' was an event which my family was determined to prolong to the utmost and enjoy to the full.

Now that the 'pylon men' were right there within sight of

the house, digging their holes, bolting their pylons together and setting them up in their blocks of wet cement, my father, my uncle, Tom and Mattha would walk out each day to 'give them a bit hand with the work'. This consisted mainly in everyone sitting down for a smoke, a yarn and a general exchange of views on everything under the sun. The pylon party consisted of an energetic young foreman, who was a native of Perth, and four men who had been recruited locally. At first the young foreman did not take easily to the business of sitting down for a smoke, for he could put a cigarette in his mouth and shin up a pylon like a monkey, but after a day or two of the Highland: "Och, take your ease, lad. What's your hurry?" he fell a victim to the Reachfar concept of time and would pause to discuss football, politics, the weather or the latest gossip about the new people at the shop at Dinchory crossroads with the best of them. At long last, however, the last pylon was up, the last connection was made, the lines and wiring of the house were inspected by a business-like young man who pronounced himself satisfied and went away, having told us that the power would be available at the end of forty-eight hours.

We then got into what Twice and I in private called the 'fiddling with knobs' period. My father, George and Tom now lurked about the house and could not pass a switch without clicking it either up or down, and they turned the main switch on the cooker, twisted the knobs on the cooker itself and pulled in and out the plug in the standard lamp. When my aunt hounded them out of the house they went and fiddled with the switches in the barn and other places, but as soon as they had gone my aunt would push the plug of the electric iron into the socket provided for it, set the iron on the table, turn the switch and stand back and look upon it with pride, her head on one side, as an artist might look upon his canvas. Twice and I seemed to spend most of our time turning switches to the 'off' position.

It had been decided that Tom, as the oldest inhabitant, would switch on the first light, which was to be the main ceiling light in the kitchen. I have already commented on the Reachfar concept of time, and I am now about to comment on the Reachfar concept of space. Yards and miles have nothing to do with distance at Reachfar. If, ten miles away, there lives someone that you like, that person is a 'neighbour'

Martha, who is prone to mass suggestion, was almost beside herself, so that she darted about like a small humming-bird, and even the laconic Jim said to me with a quiver in his voice: "Say, this is the darnedest thing I ever been mixed up in! It's like waiting for a *miracle* to happen!"

It was Monica who replied: "The thing is a miracle, but it takes somebody like Tom to tell you and me, fools that we are, when we are in the presence of a miracle."

"Gee, you could be right at that," said Jim.

"I think you should try it now, Tom," Twice said, coming in from the passage where the fusebox was located.

"Is it there, think ye?" Tom asked, approaching the switch.

"Aye, I think so," said Twice into the breathless silence that had descended over the crowd of people.

Very slowly and carefully Tom put his fingers on the switch, drew back, looked up at the lamp which hung from the ceiling, took a deep breath and depressed the switch. The room was flooded with light that shone down on the up-turned faces, silent, transfixed, in a wonder that was worship of the truest kind.

"There!" said Tom, looking up at the light, "isn't that chust beautiful!"

That one phrase seemed to express what everyone felt, and with a sigh of satisfaction the crowd broke into a mass of movement, as people began to go all over the house and steading, switching on lights and switching them off again. Twice and I and one or two of the others were taking no part in this orgy and we went out of the kitchen on to the grass patch by the door for a breath of air in spite of the midges that were dancing in clouds in the dying light. We had been there for some ten minutes when Twice suddenly said: "Hi, does anybody smell anything?"

"Smell?" we said, and then I looked round and saw clouds of smoke pouring out through the kitchen window.

"Great God!" said Twice and we dashed into the house.

The top of the cooker was a smouldering pyre of sundry scarves, hats, coats, Flora Mackenzie's shopping-bag, Mrs Gilchrist's fox fur and Sir Torquil's glengarry bonnet. The fiddlers with knobs had left the cooker with every switch standing at 'Full On'.

"Well," said Twice, "there it is. If I've turned off that

main switch once today I've turned it off a dozen times."

"They certainly go the whole hog around here," said Jim. "They have their miracle and then they go in for a burnt offering." The words summarized with accurate truth the atmosphere of wonder and gratitude that was abroad that night when the lights came in to Reachfar, making a new bend in the long river of its time.

There had been a tacit, unspoken understanding among us all that the 'coming in of the lights' was to mark the end of our visit, and the next morning at breakfast we visitors gathered in the kitchen to be met with an aspect of my family which was familiar to me and to Twice, although not to the others. My father, my aunt, George and Tom were pursuing a policy of what they called 'taking no notice'. They did not want us to go away, so they were treating the thought of our departure as if it were some childish tantrum, some old man's whim or some latest request on the part of the Government that they should fill in yet another foolish form. Even when Martha, Jim, Matthew and their chauffeur arrived with all their baggage packed in the car, my family ignored the fact that they were booted and spurred for travel and went on with their post-mortem on the party of the evening before.

Mrs Gilchrist had been extremely angry about the loss of her fox fur in the cooker conflagration, and my family chose to regard this anger of hers as one last and clinching proof of the basic 'foolishness' of Mrs Gilchrist. Their attitude, it seemed, was that Mrs Gilchrist could not in reason expect to be present at the miracle of our lights coming in and at the same time be upset at the loss of a fox fur in the course of the miracle. The fox fur dominated the breakfast table.

"What I canna quite grasp," said George in his most parliamentary voice, after the Garvins had been more or less forced to sit down and have a cup of tea, "is why she put on the fox fur to come to Reachfar last night. She's never worn it to come here before and it wasn't a cold evening."

"No, now that ye mention it, George," my father said weightily, "that's quite a point that you are making. That's quite right. Always, before, she never wore that fox fur except to the church on a Sunday."

"Ach!" said my aunt disgustedly. "She put it on to impress our visitors - what then would she put it on for? The silly

cratur! As if Monica and Martha had never seen a fox fur before!"

"And a fine stink it made, too, and it burning," said Tom thoughtfully. "Of course, they always did tell me that the fox was a terrible beast for stink."

At long last, however, the Garvins managed to break through the conversational barrier of the fox fur and announced that they were on their way to John o' Groats.

"Ach, what's your hurry?" - my father.

"You could be waiting for your dinners at least, for Lord knows what the hotels on the road will be giving you!" - my aunt.

"God knows to me why ye should be needing to be going up to that bleak place where there is nothing but a puckle sheep!" - Tom.

"Why not stop here and take a run up on Sunday chust for the day? I might even get a loan of the Laird's kilt and come with you myself" - George.

That almost did it, for Martha, of course, wanted my uncle to come with them right away, not recognizing the Highland cunning that did not wish to go anywhere, but merely wished to maintain the *status quo*. Twice broke through this new barrage of discussion and simplified matters for the Garvins by announcing that he, Mattha and I would have to back to Ballydendran in a day or two, and behind the screen of the resistance set up to this the Garvins and Matthew said their good byes and got away, but not before Martha had tears streaming from her bright eyes.

"Och, well," my father said as the car disappeared as a mere speck on the main road some miles away, "maybe Monica will stay with us for a while."

Monica looked at him with this strange, new, silent glance of hers and said: "Maybe, Reachfar."

There was a lot to do about the house that day, for my aunt is the type of woman who will not rest until the last vestige of an upheaval, such as the party of the night before, has been cleared away and the house restored to its norm, so all morning Monica and I washed, dried and stacked away the extra glasses, crockery and cutlery that had been in use, while the men, finding the house too busy for comfort, decided they had much to do out of doors and took themselves off with various excuses. In the later afternoon Sir Torquill

arrived in the barn with his gun over his arm, and Twice took my uncle's gun from its rack and they both disappeared on to the moor.

"Sir Torquil and Twice get on very well," I said to Monica over the sink that now held the tea dishes.

"They would, of course," she said.

"I don't see why," I countered. "They've got nothing much in common."

"Maybe not," she replied in this new, quiescent way of hers. I hated this passive quiescence which was so foreign to the Monica I had once known.

"Next time I come up here," I said fiercely as I wrung out the dish-cloth, "I'm going to bring Loose and Daze to wash the dishes. I'm sick to death of dishwashing, but they don't seem to mind it. . . . Come for a walk, Monica!"

"Why?"

"Why not?"

She smiled very faintly. "Oh, all right."

We set off north-easterly from the house, over a few arable fields first, and then on to the open slope of the East Moor. I had a tense 'now or never' feeling, as we followed the grass track that was smooth and green from the years of trampling by cattle and sheep, in contrast to the rough brown of the short heather on either side.

"So you are not going to California with Jim Garvin?" I asked bluntly.

"No," she said.

"He asked you to go, of course?"

"Yes."

"Poor Jim. I'm sorry."

"He's young. He'll get over it."

"He's older than you, Monica."

"Don't pretend to be a fool," she told me. "He is an innocent young soul from a raw, young world. . . . I could be his great-grandmother. Jim Garvin doesn't need *me*."

"I sat down on one of the many boulders that bestrew our infertile Reachfar moors. "Have a cigarette, my pet, and be taking your ease, as Tom would say. . . . Monica, why didn't you tell me that you had been ill when you were up here?"

"So they told you?"

"They had to. Don't be foolish. I am *bound* to find out anything that goes on around here."

"Yes," she said. "That's true, I suppose."

"But *you* should have told me."

"Why? I didn't think it was of epoch-making interest."

I do not think that a conversation for any of us consists merely in the words and present thoughts exchanged. I am certain that, for me, conversation is not like this, anyhow, for in my mind no conversation is a straight progression of question and answer, comment and counter-comment, but a jumbled mass of impressions, sidelights, shafts of light and blocks of shadow that come unbidden out of the past to alter and change the significance of the present words that are being spoken. In a nostalgic flash now I thought that there had been a time in Monica's and my life when that word 'epoch' could not have been used between us without evoking a silly but enjoyable companionable giggle.

At one stage during the war a new senior administrative officer was posted to our unit, a long, thin, depressed-looking man who was introduced to Monica and me as 'Wing Commander Enoch'. When the Commanding Officer had moved away round the mess with him, Monica said: "Enoch. You would hardly believe it, would you? Why is it that the syllable 'och' is so very all right in Scotland and so fantastically wrong in England. It simply isn't in the language, I suppose."

"It is, you know," I said. "Look at 'epoch'."

"True - well, this is the epoch of Enoch," said Monica.

That was the sort of thing that we laughed at.

"I bet you couldn't say that after the fifth whisky," I said.

"If your mess bill limit will stand the other four each, try me and see!" she challenged, and before the night was out she and I were going around testing the enunciation of the entire mess, including the amazed Enoch of the epoch. I giggled again, now, when she spoke the word 'epoch', but when I said "The epoch of Enoch" in explanation of the giggle, she merely gave a flickering smile that died away at once into her new, quiescent pensiveness.

"What odd ideas you have!" I said then. "The fact that you were on the verge of a nervous breakdown ~~the fact~~ seems to me to explain a lot that wants explaining."

"But it doesn't," she said. "To say the breakdown ~~explains~~ it would be the easy way, but - it doesn't."

"Doesn't?"

"No." Her voice was cold and flat. "It wasn't a nervous breakdown that made me try to break up you and Twice. It was trying to break you up that caused the nervous breakdown."

"But, Monica - why did you want to - break us up, as you put it?"

"The obvious reason."

"I don't see it," I told her. "You mean, you wanted Twice for yourself?"

"No. Not that." Her voice was calmly indifferent. "I wanted *you* for myself. He was taking you away from me - as David took Sybbie. I thought that if I could create a situation - before you were married, this was - you would break the thing off. I know how fastidious you are about relationships."

Without my own volition I had drawn physically apart from her, putting distance between us as much as I could. She looked down at my hand, making me realize that I was pressing my skirt against my thigh. Her mouth twisted a little.

"Don't get me wrong, Janet. Don't pull your skirts aside for the wrong reason. It isn't a Lesbianistic or sexual thing - I am not like that. You ought to know that." Quietly, she began to cry, slow, painful tears rolling down her cheeks. "I have it all sorted out in my mind now. But it is all too late. I have destroyed something that I can never rebuild."

I was suddenly filled with love and pity for her, which seemed to travel in my bloodstream and along my nerves and threatened to burst out through the tips of my fingers.

"Monica, you must tell me. You must tell me all about it, simply, so that I can understand. Tell me right from the beginning. Remember that awful night in late 1939 or early '40 when Garrity and the other one had the fight? And you brought out the Tsar's flask?"

"Yes. That was the beginning. No. The beginning really goes a way back before that. Oh, where does anything begin? . . . Janet, do you know something? Something peculiar? I am the wealthiest member of my whole family. Did you know that?"

"No," I said.

"No. People don't. Naturally they think of Papa being the one."

She was silent for a little. "You once told me about your friend Muriel – you said she was 'money-funny'. I am not like that. At least, I don't think so. But it is easy for people to get money-funny. I'll try to tell you about it. You see, Aunt Harriet, Papa's sister—"

"The one in the painting at Beechwood who is so like you?"

"Yes. That's the one. She was a famous Edwardian beauty – she married an American Jew called Schliemann—"

"Ball-bearings?"

"Yes, and steel and railroads and razor-blades and a million other things. They had no children. I was her favourite niece, because I was so like her in looks. In 1938, when she died, the Schliemann fortune, which had come entirely to her, came to *me*. I was twenty-one. Money really is a funny thing, Janet. Whether it is a little or a lot, it is a funny thing. Funny-peculiar. There is some justification for saying that the love of it is the root of all evil. I don't want to be tedious, but that money spoiled every relationship I had except the one with Mama, and even that was not quite the same. But the worst thing was Sybbie. She and I had been friends – real sister-friends – when we were children – you have no sisters – maybe you don't realize how deep the relationship can go – and Sybbie and I were very close in age. Something happened. I can't explain it. I gave some of the money to Sybbie, but it did no good. The break was there and she simply grew away from me, went off in a different direction – maybe she would have done that, anyway, and I am wrong in saying it was the money. Then she married David, and he is *really* money-funny. I don't think he thinks of anything much else, and Sybbie started getting more and more like him and further and further away from *me*. So the war came and I joined the ranks of the WAAF. Papa had got me some sort of secretaryship or something in one of the ministries, but I quarrelled with the family and went off into the WAAF. I don't think Mama understood it at all, but she wasn't nasty about it. I wanted to get away. I wanted to be in something where everybody was part of a herd, where I would be treated as someone who was no different from anybody else. It worked. The title, even, did not matter – there were lots of titles in the WAAF – in all the real ways, it did not matter. Then I met you." She paused

for a moment, gazing away across the firth at the hump of Ben Wyvis. "I had the feeling now of being free from the eyes of the family, which was a thing I had wanted, but the life was so *unreal*, so beyond imagination that I could not believe that it was a real way of life or that I was among real people at all. Remember that house where Haggerty and Garrity used to be drunk? The small rooms, the pinched-in-ness of it all? And the lack of solidity? The feeling of instability? If you moved, a hunk of plaster fell down? And there were you, right in the middle of it, solid as a rock, a real person with a mind I could understand and yet as solid as a lump of granite in the middle of all that papier-mâché. And you were so kind."

I? Kind? Kind to Monica Loame? She was going on again.

"And you had your firm, definite standards, and you weren't in the least nervous about applying them, *forcing* them on all these unreal people, with your: 'Haggerty, you filthy cow! Don't leave that comb lying there full of hair!' and your 'Empty these ashes in the dust-bin - we don't have to make a slum of the place!' and your 'Clean that stain off your tunic, Garrity - it's the King's uniform you're wearing, you slattern!' . . . Oh, I can remember them all, the things you said. Small things, big things; the standards were there and you fought for them tooth and nail. It made you, for me, the only steady thing in the world. Remember, you know, that my background had cracked on me. I was young enough to have written it all off - family, tradition, Beechwood, everything - as decayed and outworn because it seemed to have let me down. And as you know, I am quite articulate - I told my family in fairly round terms how little use I had for them all. . . . I came to depend on you more and more, and when the war ended I determined to see where you came from, what made you what you were. You did not invite me to your home - oh, I know that you thought it had nothing to interest me or to offer me - but I came." With the tears on her cheeks, she gave a little laugh. "I had quite an amount of difficulty - especially with Aunt Kate - at first. She couldn't think why I had come to Reachfar and was too polite to ask! But I am not without wit of a sort - I talked about you until I had won them round. Before I left, their attitude to *me* was very much like their attitude

Mike stood up. "All this sleep talk has made me warm and uncomfortable," he said. "Anybody for a cold beer?"

"You know, Mike," Allison said, raising her voice so that he could hear her in the kitchen, "Peter Drake doesn't like Tim Randlett, either."

"Well, what would you expect?" asked Connie. "Did you think he'd be overjoyed at the appearance of a rival? Peter's been in love with Selena for years."

"He said that Tim's a big phoney and I quote," said Allison.

"Maybe he's right," said Mike, coming back into the living-room with three brimming glasses of beer. "Not that I'd go so far as calling Randlett a phoney. I don't think he means to be phoney, but I do think that he's been insincere for so long that he doesn't even realize he's that way."

"Sour grapes," said Connie, licking a little rim of white foam from her top lip.

"You've been in Peyton Place too long," laughed Allison. "You've become a native and now you distrust Tim because he makes a living at something as unorthodox as acting."

"And not only that," said Connie, "but you've become a gossip."

"Ayea," said Mike in an exaggerated drawl.

But Mike Rossi was not the only one who was worried about Selena's relationship with Tim Randlett. Dr Matthew Swain had met Selena on Elm Street and, as he told Seth Buswell later, he almost didn't recognize her. It was as if a light had been turned on inside Selena. She glowed and her smile flashed continually.

"Hello, Matt," she said.

It was the first time in her life that she had called him anything but Doc.

"Well, hello, Selena," said Matt. "My goodness, you look radiant this morning. No need to ask how you are. It's obvious."

"I feel generous, too," Selena laughed. "Come on into Hyde's and I'll treat you to coffee."

Matthew Swain waited until Corey Hyde had served them before he spoke.

"Are you in love with him, Selena?" he asked.

"In love with whom?" she teased.

But Matt did not laugh with her. "With Tim Randlett," he said.

"Yes," she said. "Yes, I am, Matt."

"I thought that summertime actors moved around a lot more than Tim does," said the doctor, lighting his pipe.

"In the first place," said Selena, "Tim is not a 'summer-time actor'. He's a full-fledged, year-around actor. And, yes, actors usually do move around in the summer but the theatre at Silver Lake is conducting an experiment this year in repertory theatre and Tim is even getting a chance to do some directing."

"I see," said Matt. "What's he going to be doing this fall?"

"Matt, I told you. Acting isn't a part-time thing with Tim. He'll be acting in the fall in New York."

Matthew Swain took a deep breath. "Are you going with him?" he asked.

Selena looked down into her coffee cup. "I don't know," she said. "He hasn't asked me."

"Will you go if he does ask?"

Selena raised her head and looked the doctor straight in the eyes.

"Yes," she said. "And if he doesn't ask me, I'll ask him."

"What about Joey?"

"Joey stays with me, no matter where I go."

"And what does Joey say about all this?"

Selena laughed. "Stop being such a worry wart, Matt," she said. "Joey's crazy about Tim. They get along beautifully together."

"Have you told Peter Drake?" asked Matt.

For a moment, some of the glow left Selena's face.

"No," she said. "But I will."

"He'll take it hard," said Matt.

"Matt, I can't help it," said Selena a little impatiently.

"I never meant to hurt Peter, but he's known for a long time that I'm not in love with him and never have been."

"Peter's in love with you," said the doctor.

"Matt, what are you trying to say?" demanded Selena. "For heaven's sake, spit it out and get it over with."

He looked at her for a long moment. "We've known each other for a long time, Selena," he said at last. "I'm just trying to make sure that you're not going to get hurt. That's all I care about. After all, none of us knows anything about this Tim Randlett, so bear with an old man's concern for a minute."

Selena was suddenly in a raging anger. "No, you don't know anything about him," she cried. "He's not from Peyton Place so therefore he's suspect. Well, how come no one ever suspected a nice, Peyton Place resident like Lucas? Tell me that?"

"Selena," said Matt, putting out a restraining hand, "I never meant anything like that, I only wondered——"

"I know goddamn well what you were wondering," said Selena furiously. "You're wondering if I'm sleeping with him, aren't you? You and everybody else in Peyton Place. Well, yes I am, Matt. Every single chance I get and even that isn't often enough!"

"Selena," said the doctor calmly, "we've known each other too long. Don't try to shock me."

Selena wilted. "I'm sorry, Doc," she said, reverting to the name she had always used. "I love him. I can't help myself. If he doesn't ask me to marry him, I think I'll die."

Matthew Swain reached out and patted her arm.

"If he doesn't ask you, you send him along to me. It'll be because he's sick."

At the end of the first week in August so many things happened at once that, as Connie Rossi remarked, she was hard put to remember which end was up. Mike was offered and accepted a position to teach history at the high school at White River. Allison was invited to go to Hollywood as a 'technical adviser' for the making of the motion picture based on *Samuel's Castle*, and Betty Anderson came home.

As Selena Cross said to Tim Randlett, "Thank heavens! When they're talking about someone else, they're giving us a rest."

So August passed in a series of heavy, heat-laden days and the farmers looked with stunned eyes at the earth which seemed ready to explode with its load of fruitfulness. They began to harvest their second crops of hay while in sheds and barns all over northern New England women nailed apple crates together for the outsized crop to come. Potato plants wilted and died as the vegetables below the ground sucked life from them and grew fat with solid, white meat, and everywhere flower gardens struck the eye almost hurtfully with their overloads of bloom and colour.

Those grown old resisted hope and promise with a suspicion older than outcroppings of granite.

"'Twon't last," they said. "There'll be the day of reckoning."

But the young stared at the magnificent summer as if each of them had received an overwhelming, unexpected gift. They forgot the summers of drought and the summers of wet cold, and after a while they ridiculously began to assume that all summers to come would be just like this one.

"Well, thank God we won't have to put the house up for sale," said Connie Rossi to her husband. "With White River only nine miles away, you can commute very nicely."

"Before anything," said Mike, "I'd better start reading a few books. It's been a long time since I thought of teaching history to a bunch of kids who don't give a damn about the War of 1812 and are bored glassy-eyed with the Declaration of Independence."

Connie and Allison made several all-day trips to Boston, choosing a new wardrobe for Allison to take to Hollywood, and all of Peyton Place buzzed with the news of Betty Anderson's return and waited to see what Leslie Harrington would do.

No one had the time nor the inclination to think about Selena Cross, and as the end of August drew near no one but Joey and Peter Drake noticed the change in her. The shine

of happiness that had marked her and set her apart had faded and her figure grew almost gaunt with an unbecoming thinness. Her eyes were circled with dark shadows and even the electric darkness of her hair seemed faded and lifeless.

"For God's sake, Selena," said Peter Drake. "What's the matter with you? Are you ill?"

"No," she replied shortly. "It's nothing."

And Joey was frightened. He remembered the way Selena had looked all during the months Lucas's body had been decaying under the ground almost at her feet, and she looked the same way now.

"Please," said Joey. "Let's go see Doc Swain."

"It's nothing," Selena insisted. "It's just the heat."

But to Peter Drake, Joey confessed his suspicions.

"It must be Tim Randlett," he said. "He's doing something to her. Something awful, and she won't stop seeing him."

"It can't be Randlett," said Peter. "She claims she loves him."

"I don't care," said Joey, and his voice shook with anger at Tim and worry for Selena. "It must be something he's doing."

"He's asked her to marry him."

"I know," replied Joey. "And she said yes, but now I don't want her to. In the beginning I thought he was all right. But not now."

Peter Drake closed his eyes for a moment, as if by doing so he could stop the pain that Selena's actions had cost him.

"There's nothing we can do, Joey. There's nothing to do but wait."

IT WAS raining hard the way it will only in August, with plump, heavy drops that splattered out on the roads and sidewalks like silver pennies. Betty Anderson held her son, Roddy, tightly by the hand as the train pulled into Pcyton Place. The conductor held a black umbrella which he opened when the train stopped and Betty stepped down on to the platform. The conductor reached up one arm to swing Roddy down, but Betty pushed his arm aside.

"I'll do it," she said, and then, as the conductor stepped back she added more gently, "He doesn't like to be handled by strangers."

"Lots of 'em don't at that age," said the conductor cheerfully. "What is he? About five?"

"He'll be five years old next month," said Betty.

"I'm more than four and a half," said Roddy proudly. "I used to be four and a half, but now I'm more."

The conductor grinned. "Well, then," he said, "you must be strong enough to carry your mother's suitcases."

"No," said Roddy seriously. "I don't have to carry anything but Wendel."

"And is this Wendel?" the conductor asked extending a hand towards the rather grubby giraffe that the child held.

"Yes," said Roddy. "That's Wendel, and he is very tired from his long trip. When my grandfather gets here, Wendel is going to ride in a car. He likes to ride in cars."

"And do you like to ride in your grandfather's car?" asked the conductor.

"I don't know," said Roddy.

"Come on, darling," said Betty. "It's damp out here. Let's go inside."

"Goodbye," said Roddy.

The conductor waved as he boarded the train and Betty and Roddy started towards the station. She did not look back as the train pulled away, but she felt her back stiffen.

I should get right back on, she thought, and keep going, fight the hell out of here. I never should have come in the first place. I must have a screw loose or something.

The station hadn't changed any, she noticed. It was still the same shabby structure it had been when she had left Peyton Place five years before.

A little older, she thought, looking at the buildings. A little more weathered and beat up, perhaps, but substantially the same. Like me, I guess.

Roddy was looking up at the high-ceilinged waiting-room.

"Is this where my grandfather lives?" he asked.

"No," said Betty. "This is a railroad station where people buy their tickets so that they can ride on the train. Your grandfather lives in a house. A great, big, fine house. The biggest house on Chestnut Street."

"Are we going to sleep there?" asked Roddy, beginning to rub his eyes with the knuckles of one hand. "Wendel is tired."

"I don't know yet," said Betty, and she spoke with an effort for she had just looked up and seen Leslie Harrington coming towards her. He had Charles Partridge with him.

He must be worried, thought Betty wryly, to bring his lawyer with him. The son-of-a-bitch.

It was Charles who said hello and extended his hand to Betty first. Leslie was staring at Roddy.

I knew it, he thought. I knew all along that it was a boy. And the image of his father.

It was true. Roddy had the same dark good looks, the same sturdy body that had been Rodney Harrington's.

"Hello, Betty," said Leslie at last. "Welcome home."

"This isn't home," said Roddy. "This is where we came to visit."

Leslie hesitated, and although he spoke to the child his eyes were on Betty.

"Well, maybe after you visit for a while, you'll like it here so much that you'll want to stay," he said.

Betty looked Leslie straight in the eye.

"Don't count on it, Leslie," she said.

"Are you my grandfather?" asked Roddy.

Leslie felt as if he had been struck a hard blow in the pit of his stomach.

Goddamn old fool, he chided himself. Getting all *soggy* at the sound of a word.

"Yes," he said, when he could speak. "I am your grandfather."

"Are we going to sleep in your great, big, fine house?" asked Roddy.

Leslie looked at Betty who stood still and merely looked right back at him.

"Yes," he said. "There is a very special room all ready for you at my house."

"Wendel is tired," said Roddy.

to put anything over on this girl. She may have let him get away with it once, but she's older and smarter now, and she's still got that stubborn streak.

"You drive, Charlie," said Leslie as they got into the car. "I have to sit here and hold Wendel."

He'd better not try any tricks on me this time, thought Betty as she slammed the car door. I was dumb once, but I'm not any more. Five years in the city toughens you up real good.

The past few years had not been easy ones for Betty Anderson, but then, she hadn't expected them to be. In the beginning, when she finally knew that Rodney was not going to marry her and that all the money she was going to get from Leslie was two hundred and fifty dollars, she had been almost desperate. Her own family would not help her, she knew. She was on her own and there was nothing to do but make the best of it.

Thank God, I've never been a weeper, thought Betty as she boarded the train for New York. If I were, I'd sure as hell be bawling all over the place now.

She was grateful, too, that her figure still retained its slimness and that she was not plagued with the morning sickness or fainting spells that would have made working an impossibility.

When she got to New York, she found a job before she found a place to stay; then, with her immediate future momentarily secured, she looked for a room. She found one, and although it was a dark, depressing place she was pleased with the rent and, she told herself cheerfully, it wasn't as if she were going to be stuck there for ever. Once she got the foolishness of having the baby out of the way and the business of placing it for adoption, she would be free to look for a better job, to look around for a man with money and, finally, to get married. She had not counted on the fact that she might love her child and that, in fact, she might begin to love him even before he was born.

She was working in a restaurant where the tips were fairly good and the customers easily satisfied.

Which, Betty thought ruefully, was a lucky thing for her because she had never been cut out to be a waitress.

She was constantly forgetting things: a napkin, glasses of water, filled sugar bowls, but Betty had always had a warm smile and the customers were mostly men. Betty smiled and laughed out loud at herself and twished her hips, and the men laughed along with her and watched her behind appreciatively and tipped generously.

They asked her for dates, too, but Betty always flashed her left hand with its dime-store wedding band and told them that her husband was six feet tall with shoulders like a brick wall and that he'd kill any man who tried to date her up while he was away in the Army. But she smiled when she said it and she spoke in such a way that every man thought that if things had been different, if she were the kind to run around, he would be the one man she would choose.

If I ever get rid of this goddamn bundle, thought Betty savagely, then I'll really cut loose.

But one afternoon, when she was changing from her uniform to her street clothes, she felt a twinge in her belly that left her weak, not with pain, but with surprise.

Well, I'll be damned! she thought.

She walked all the way to her room and as soon as she got there, she undressed and lay down on her bed. She put her hands flat against her abdomen and waited, and then it happened again. She could actually see the movement under her skin.

Well, I'll be damned, she thought again and grinned.

Well, I'll be damned, she thought again and grinned.

deliver her baby for seventy-five dollars. He reserved a room for her in a hospital and told her exactly what it would cost her to stay there for five days.

"Will you have someone to look after you and the baby when you return home, Mrs Harrington?" asked the doctor, using the name she had given him.

"Yes," said Betty, hiding the rather wry smile on her lips. "I have a family."

She spent the next months learning everything she could about baby care. She bought napkins and nightgowns and safety pins and decided that she would need neither blankets nor bottles. The baby would sleep in the same bed with her and she would nurse him herself. Now, she gorged herself on the one meal a day she was allowed at the restaurant and she hid cake and bread and cheese in her handbag so that she could eat in her room without using any money.

Instead of taking a drink of water at the restaurant, she drank milk. Water she drank at home. And every cent she could keep from spending went into a bank account to pay for the hospital and to support her during the weeks after the baby was born when she would have to stay with him.

Rodney Harrington, Junior, she thought. That's what I'll name him. He has a right to the name, and he's going to have it. To hell with Peyton Place and everybody in it.

Luckily for her, the owner of the restaurant where she worked was an Italian with six children of his own. His wife had worked right up to the last minute and it hadn't hurt her a bit. So he kept Betty on as she grew larger and larger, cautioning her against lifting heavy trays and to watch out for wet places on the kitchen floor.

"You need something lifted, you call me," he told her. "And don't worry about a thing. It's good for a woman to stay on her feet when she's that way. Makes it easier when her times comes."

The Italian's wife said, "Don't worry about nothin'. Your husband's away, I'll come visit in the hospital. After, I come help you with the baby. Don't worry about nothin'."

"These days," said the Italian, snapping his fingers, "it's nothin' for a woman to have a baby. Bing, in the hospital. Bing, with the ether. Bing, the baby. All over."

The baby was born at the end of October and things worked out just as Betty had planned. Her delivery was an easy one in spite of Roddy's husky nine and a half pounds, and Betty's breasts overflowed with milk to feed him. From the first, he was a contented baby who never cried except when he was hungry or wet; and, as the weeks went by, he seemed to grow right in front of Betty's eyes. When he was three months old, she knew that it was time for her to go back to work. There were twenty-one dollars and sixty-seven cents left in the bank.

A woman named Agnes Carlisle lived in the room next door to Betty's, and during the time that Betty had lived there, she and Agnes had become good friends. Agnes was a retired schoolteacher, who struggled every month to make ends meet on her pension and was only too glad to look after Roddy every evening for the small sum that Betty could pay.

"He's so good, he won't be any trouble," said Agnes cheerfully. "And even if he were, I wouldn't mind. He's such a beautiful baby."

Betty almost laughed out loud at the sight of the grey, stern-looking woman bending over the bed talking baby talk to Roddy.

"He looks just like his father," said Betty.

The years passed quickly. When Roddy was three, the Italians opened a new restaurant in another part of town and Betty was made manager of the old place. She earned a decent wage now and often thought of moving from her dark, dingy room. But Roddy was as fond of Agnes Carlisle as she was of him, and Agnes was teaching Roddy to read and write so that he'd be ahead of the other children when he started school.

"With our school system the way it is today," said Agnes, "the only child who has a chance is the one who gets outside help. I'll see that Roddy gets that."

So Betty stayed where she was. She dated a variety of men, but, as she told Agnes, she wasn't about to get married.

"I like my life the way it is," she said. "Uncomplicated. I've got Roddy and my job and no entanglements. I'm going to keep it that way."

Agnes was the only person in New York who knew that Betty had never been married. Betty never discussed the subject with the men who took her out except when they got serious. Then she would tell them that she had been married and didn't want to make the same mistake again.

It was on the Fourth of July that Agnes saw the advertisement in the personal column of a tabloid newspaper. She, Betty and Roddy had returned from an afternoon in the park and Betty was making iced coffee.

"This is a funny one," said Agnes.

"What?" asked Betty, leaning over Agnes's shoulder.

"This," said Agnes, pointing out the advertisement.

"Read it to me," said Betty. "I forgot to put an ice cube in Roddy's milk and as soon as he realizes it he'll start yelling."

"Betty, where are you?" said Agnes.

"What?" asked Betty, turning around, surprised.

"That's what it says here in the paper," replied Agnes.

"Betty, where are you? Please contact me as soon as you see this. Urgent. Leslie Harrington, Box 213, Peyton Place Times."

Betty sat down on a hassock at Agnes's feet. "Well, I'll be damned," she said softly.

"It's meant for you, isn't it?" Agnes asked.

"Yes," said Betty.

"Is it——" She hesitated and glanced at Roddy who was looking solemnly from Agnes to his mother. She lowered her voice. "Is it Roddy's g-r-a-n-d-f-a-t-h-e-r?" she asked, spelling out the last word.

"Roddy what?" asked Roddy, and then he glanced down into his glass. "Eye-cube! Eye-cube!" he yelled.

Betty took an ice cube from her glass of iced coffee and put it into his glass.

"Yes," she said to Agnes.

"Are you going to write to him?"

"I don't know."

"Are you out of your mind?" asked Agnes. "You told me that he had plenty of money. It's about time he did something for R-o-d-d-y."

"Roddy," cried Roddy, triumphantly.

Agnes groaned. "Why did I have to teach him to spell," she said.

"I don't know as I want anything from him," said Betty.

"Don't be a fool," said Agnes. "If he wants to do something for the child, let him. Are you going to be stuck in a hovel like this all your life? And Roddy, too? Take what you can get. Don't wind up like me."

Betty looked at Agnes for a long time. She saw herself, grown old, living alone in her dark room. Living on pennies and in fear.

"I'm not going to write," she said. "I'll see how serious he is about wanting to get in touch with me. I'll telephone him. Collect."

She put in the call, smiling gleefully at the thought of Leslie's discomfiture at hearing from her through a nosy, Peyton Place telephone operator.

"What do you want, Leslie?" she asked as soon as she heard his voice.

Leslie hesitated for only a moment. "I want you to come home," he said.

"Isn't this a little out of character for you, Leslie?"

"I've been trying to find you for years," said Leslie.

"Why?" asked Betty coldly. "There was a time when you couldn't wait to get rid of me."

"Betty," said Leslie, and she was almost shocked at the note of pleading in his voice. "Tell me about the baby?"

"Well, he's hardly a baby," replied Betty. "He's going on five."

"A boy," said Leslie, and for a long minute the phone was silent except for his breathing. "A boy? What's his name?"

"Rodney Harrington, Junior," said Betty, and waited for Leslie to protest.

"That's wonderful, Betty," said Leslie, and Betty was so surprised that she took the receiver away from her ear and looked down into the mouthpiece as if she wanted to see Leslie's face. "Please, Betty," he was saying. "Say you'll come."

"I'll have to think it over," said Betty.

"I'll send you a cheque for the fare," Leslie offered.

"You're damned right you will," said Betty with a humourless little laugh.

"I'll put it in the mail right now," he said. "Just give me your address."

"Nothing doing," said Betty. "The last thing I want is to find you camped on my doorstep. I told you I'd think it over and I will. I'll call you at the end of the week."

"At least give me your telephone number," said Leslie.

"No," said Betty, and hung up abruptly.

The following week was one of hell for Betty. All her life she hated indecision, and her days were not made any easier by Agnes's almost constant nagging.

"Stop thinking of yourself," said Agnes. "Think of Roddy."

And: "Do you want to spend the rest of your life working in a greasy restaurant?"

And: "I'm not going to be around for ever, you know. Who'll look after Roddy then?"

And: "Roddy's one of the most intelligent children I've ever known. Are you going to cheat him out of the advantages he should have?"

And: "What if you should get sick? What would happen to Roddy then?"

"For Christ's sake," yelled Betty, "will you kindly shut up for a minute? I can't think!"

"There's nothing to think about," said Agnes decisively. "Call the old man. Pack your things. And go."

In the end, Betty telephoned Leslie Harrington.

"I can take a week off from my job," she said. "We can

come for a visit, but only for five days. We'll have to spend the other two travelling."

"Now will you give me your address so that I can mail you a cheque?" asked Leslie.

"No," said Betty. "I've thought it over, and I don't think I want to be beholden to you for a damned thing. The only reason I'm going to see you at all is that you're Roddy's grandfather. Every child should have a chance to meet his grandfather. And that's the only reason, believe me."

"Wire me what train you're taking," said Leslie.

"Yes, I will."

The car turned into the wide, gravelled driveway in front of the Harrington house.

"Here we are," said Leslie. "Roddy's asleep."

Yes, thought Betty. Here we are, indeed.

AUGUST HAD been more than half gone when Selena had become aware of an almost imperceptible change in Tim Randlett. He began to question her about her past and if she didn't answer him he sulked.

"Listen," he said, "I want you to be my wife. Husbands and wives don't have secrets from one another. If they do it's no kind of marriage."

Selena barely heard his last two sentences.

"What did you say?" she asked in almost unbelieving joy.

"I said that I want you to be my wife and——"

She put restraining fingers across his lips.

"Don't say anything else," she said. "Just say that again."

Tim laughed and took her in his arms.

"Darling," he said, "will you please do me the honour of becoming my wife?"

"Yes," said Selena, "yes, yes, yes. When?"

"In the fall," replied Tim. "After I'm finished here. We'll go to New York and find an apartment and then we'll go to Tiffany's and I'll buy you the biggest diamond in the store with a wedding band to match."

"I love you," said Selena softly. "I'll bet that no one else in the world loves anyone the way I love you."

"You'd lose," said Tim. "Because I love you that way."

Selena believed him in spite of the way he could, on occasion, look at her with a coldness that chilled her with fear.

"Tell me about this Ted Carter," he demanded.

"There's nothing to tell," replied Selena. "We were friends all through school and then one day we weren't friends any more. That's all."

"You're lying, Selena," he said.

She turned to him in disbelief. "I am not," she cried.

"Did you ever sleep with him?"

"Are you out of your mind?" she demanded angrily.

"Don't raise your voice, Selena. And why are you so angry if your conscience is clear?"

"I'm angry because you've not only doubted my word, but because you could even think such a thing about Ted and me."

"Well," said Tim with a sarcasm that hurt her more than any raised voice could have done, "let's face it, darling. I wasn't the first. Not by a long shot."

"You're behaving like a child," said Selena and turned her back to him.

Tim Randlett often behaved like a child. When he was not acting a part, either on or off stage, he reverted to the actions of the spoiled, petulant darling he had once been in Hollywood, and the worst facet of this was that he didn't believe that he was acting childish at all but that he was asserting himself and standing up for his rights. When the few people who had seen him this way accused him of immaturity, Tim either lost his temper completely or exerted himself to correct what he was convinced was a mistaken impression.

"I'm not being childish, darling," he said to Selena. "It's just that I love you so, and I want to know every single thing about you."

"Then couldn't you wait until I'm ready to tell you?" she asked.

"Of course, darling," said Tim. "There's no hurry. We have the rest of our lives to talk and find out about each other."

After every such argument, things went well between them for a short time, but then, invariably, Tim would begin again, and what hurt Selena most of all was that he usually chose a time immediately after they had ~~finished~~ making love.

"What did you and Carter do during all the years you were such dear, good friends?" he asked.

"Just what most other kids do," she replied, and prayed silently that he would stop the slightly twisted smile from appearing on the mouth she had just kissed.

"We went to school, and to dances and talked about getting married some day. Just kid stuff."

"Didn't you ever neck?"

"Yes," said Selena.

"Ah. Now the truth begins to emerge. Was he good at it?"

"Tim," she asked quietly, "what does it do for you to hear about such things? Do you get a big bang out of thinking of me kissing someone else?"

"Just answer my question," he ordered.

"I don't know," she said. "Ted was the only boy I ever kissed while I was growing up so I really have no basis for comparison."

"Do you mean to say that in a town like Peyton Place kids don't play kissing games?" he demanded, his eyebrows raised in disbelief.

"Of course they do," she replied wearily.

"And you, of course, being so pure and virginal, refused to participate in these games. Is that what you're trying to tell me?"

Selena jumped up from the bed and pulled a robe around her.

"For God's sake, Tim," she cried, "will you cut it out. You're just like a goddamned peeping Tom."

"Well, did you or didn't you?"

"Did I or didn't I what?"

"Join in the kissing games."

"Of course I did. Every kid does."

"Then you lied to me about Carter being the only boy you ever kissed."

"For God's sake," Selena shouted, "how can I remember every boy who was at every party I ever went to."

"If you'd lie about kissing, Heaven only knows what else you'd lie about."

"You're sick!" Selena yelled.

"Don't shout, darling," he said with maddening patience. "And I'm not the one who's sick. People who lie to others and to themselves are the sick ones."

"I don't lie," said Selena evenly. "I never have and I'm not about to start now."

She began to dress, keeping her head averted so that he wouldn't see the tears that she couldn't keep from rolling down her cheeks.

"What are you doing?" he demanded.

"I'm getting dressed," she replied. "I'm going home."

He was at her side at once. He turned her around to face him and kissed the tears away from her face.

"Darling," he said contritely, "I am an absolute heel. I didn't mean to make you cry. Please forgive me."

"Forget it," said Selena. "I just want to go home."

His arms went around her, holding her tightly against him.

"Don't say that," he said and his voice was harsh with fear. "Don't ever say that. If I lost you I couldn't bear it."

"I have to go," said Selena wearily. "I can't take any more arguing, or sarcasm, or your terrible accusations. I'm all punched out, Tim. I just can't stand it any more."

"Please," he begged, and now tears rolled down his cheeks. "Please, darling. Forgive me just this once more. I'll never do it again."

And then, unknowing and uncaring, Selena gave him one last hostage. She threw her arms around his neck and sobbed against his cheek.

"You don't even have to ask me," she said. "Of course, I forgive you. I could never leave you and we both know it. The idea of living without you is something I can't even begin to imagine. I'll never, never leave you."

And again it was better for a while, but now Selena found herself waiting for the quarrels to come. She was constantly tense, watching for the signs that would warn her of the approaching storm. At night she often lay awake, wondering why Tim's constant probing and prying affected her as

it did, but the only conclusion she could come to was that she had never been a dweller in the past and that not being so was the only way she had managed to survive at all. She knew, too, that there had been times when she could not remain in complete control of her thinking and then she would have terrible nightmares about her mother, Nellie, in which she saw her mother hanging, dead, a corpse with a black face and congested eyes that moved on the end of a silken cord with every breath Selena drew. At other times she dreamed of running while a gigantic, all-powerful Lucas chased her and then she would scream in her sleep until Joey came into her room and shook her awake.

"Time," Matthew Swain had said. "It may be a cliché, but it's true that it heals all wounds."

It happened the way the doctor had said it would. As the years passed, Selena's bad dreams recurred less and less frequently until at last they ceased altogether and the only time she gave in to fear was once every year on the day of the first snow. Until she had fallen in love with Tim Randlett. Now the nightmares were back, the fear, the sleepless nights. For Selena knew that soon now, Tim would get around to asking her about Lucas and Nellie and the trial and that she would have to dredge up the buried ugliness and show it to him in detail.

I won't think about it, she told herself as she tossed in her bed. I won't talk about it and if Tim wants to get ugly about it, I'll leave him.

But she knew she would not leave him, no matter what he asked of her, and the sleepless nights grew longer and Selena gagged at the sight of food, and her brother Joey said, "What's the matter, Selena?" and she had no answer for him.

I'll be calm, she thought. I won't let myself become upset about anything. Tim loves me. He's not cruel.

And that much was true. Tim Randlett did love her, in his fashion, and he was not a cruel man. It was just that now he fancied himself in the rôle of psychiatrist and had convinced himself that the dark secrets which festered in

Selena's mind were like a poison that coursed through her body and that would end up by destroying her and, therefore, him. He saw himself as a great healer and believed that the feeling of accomplishment he got from fitting one small piece of information after another into the puzzle of Selena's background was the joy of a scientist on the brink of discovery, and he never admitted to himself that there was something unlovely and perverse in his excitement.

"I only want what's good for you," he told her.

And Selena believed him because there was nothing else she could do.

They were on the couch in the living-room of his cottage one sunny afternoon at the end of August. He was sitting up and Selena lying down with her head in his lap. He stroked her hair gently away from her forehead and Selena had the wonderful, floating feeling she always had after they had made love and were quiet and close together. She was on the very edge of sleep when he spoke.

"Tell me about Lucas," he said.

For a moment, Selena was absolutely still; calmness filled her the way it sometimes will when someone has been terribly shocked and thinks, Now the worst has happened, whatever comes after this can't help but be better. But then her heart began to pound and she began to tremble.

"Stop it, Tim," she said. "I don't want to talk about Lucas or anything connected with him."

"You have to, darling," he said gently. "It's the only way you'll ever get rid of it."

She tried to get up, but he had twisted her long hair around his hand and she was held fast.

"Let go of me," she demanded.

"Darling, don't be afraid," he said softly. "Believe me, I only want what's good for you. You have to talk about it, darling. You can't go the rest of your life with all that hatred bottled up inside you."

"I don't hate Lucas any more," she said. "I stopped hating him the second he died."

"That's not true," said Tim.

This time she pulled away from him with such a wrench that he let go of her hair in surprise. She stood up and faced him, her eyes blazing with anger and pain.

"What the hell do you know about it," she cried. "You with your insulated childhood and your play-acting and your games of psychiatrist and patient. You don't know anything about anything real. All right. I'll tell you about Lucas. Maybe that'll shatter your sickening smugness."

"Don't shout, darling," Tim said in the patient, conciliatory tone that maddened her.

"I'll shout all I want," cried Selena. "You want to hear about Lucas. Well, I'll tell you. He was a pig, a drunk and the worst son-of-a-bitch that ever lived. When I was fourteen he knocked me unconscious and tore my clothes off and raped me. And after that, I don't even remember how many times, he'd send my brother Joey out and he'd lock the door and he'd beat me before he got on top of me."

She was standing in front of him, bent forward, with her fists clenched while she screamed. He took her wrists and tried to pull her down next to him on the couch.

"Please, darling," he said, almost frightened at the change in her.

She pulled away from him and kicked his shin when he tried to stand up.

"Sit down!" she shouted. "You wanted to hear it and now you'll sit still until I finish. The times when Lucas knocked me out weren't the worst times, you know. It was when I was only stunned and before I could pick myself up off the floor he grabbed me and tied me to the bed and then did it to me. Then I'd be awake and aware of every second and I'd feel him hurting me and smell his sweat and his breath and hear him grunting like a rooting pig. Those were the worst times. What's the matter, Tim? Don't you like the grubby details? My mother knew. I don't know how, but she knew. I'd catch her looking at me and I knew she knew. And Lucas was careful too. Careful as could be. He'd wait until she was out working before he'd get to me. He was big, Tim. Bigger than you. And most of the time

I'd bleed before he got through with me. Lucas didn't bleed though. He got me pregnant and I had an abortion."

Her whole body was shaking now and her breath hurt in her throat.

"I didn't really have to, you know," she said, and her voice was softer now with an almost weird hush. "Have an abortion, I mean. Lucas wasn't my flesh-and-blood father. The baby would probably have been all right. Not an idiot or anything. Lucas used to say that while he was on top of me. That I wasn't his own daughter. It seemed to excite him, as if I were a stranger. No. I didn't really have to have the abortion, but I did. I bled then, too, but not Lucas. Lucas never bled at all until I killed him. And he bled. Oh, how he bled. Blood gushed from him like a fountain, and I kept on hitting him."

Selena's eyes gleamed and her mouth was like a cut in her white face.

"I killed him," she whispered. "I hit him over the head, and I hit him and hit him and hit him until he was dead, and I enjoyed every minute of it. When I was finished his head was like an egg that had been shattered and I was happy for the first time in years. Lucas was dead, like my mother. Like my baby."

She stopped and stood still, her arms hanging limply at her sides, her dark hair falling over the side of her face.

"Is that what you wanted to hear?" she asked at last, not looking at him.

Tim came to her and she could hear the heavy sound of his breath. He was almost panting and when she did look up she could hardly believe what she saw. His eyes were gleaming and his hands trembled as he reached for her.

"Darling," he whispered hoarsely.

And when he pulled her close to him she could feel the excitement. Too late, she tried to turn and run but he held her tightly.

"So you do remember," he said. "You remember how big and strong he was, like a bull. You remember hitting him."

Selena beat against his chest and tried to bring her knee up, but she could not move.

"A girl always remembers her first lover," he said softly. "Especially if she's been raped."

His hands were hard on her, hurting her through the thin material of her summer dress, and when he kissed her his mouth was heavy and wet and merciless. She twisted and pushed against him and panic was a sickness that threatened to engulf her.

"That's what you've wanted all along," Tim said. "To be raped, the way Lucas raped you. Every time I took you in my stupid, gentle way, you were remembering him and how big and brutal he was. Well, I can be that way too. Like this."

But when he tried to push her down on the floor she managed to break away from him. She ran around the table in front of the fireplace and her hands found the fire tongs as if they had been waiting for her.

"I'll kill you!" she screamed as he started for her. "Don't move, or I'll kill you!"

But Tim was beyond listening or caring. He crept closer to her, and when he was close enough she swung the tongs in a great arc and struck him. If he had not moved at the last second, the tongs would have struck him on the side of the head. But he did move, so that only his shoulder was hit, and he staggered backwards and fell over the table and landed against the stone floor in front of the fireplace.

For a moment he was still, and in those few seconds Selena looked down at her hand and saw it clutched around the tongs. She watched in horror as her arm started to raise itself to strike again, and just then Tim groaned and sat up. Selena stared at him and then back at the weapon in her hand.

Almost! screamed a voice inside her head. Almost! I almost killed him!

And she turned and ran out of the cottage. She ran through the woods, dappled green and yellow in the

summer sun, and she ran to the highway that led to Peyton Place.

Almost! the voice screamed, and Selena ran until the world blurred in front of her eyes and the sandy shoulder of the road came up to strike her face.

BOOK THREE

1

IN SEPTEMBER, Allison left Peyton Place for a week in New York before going on to Hollywood. It meant arriving at the studio two days later than they expected her, but she decided it was more important to have a week with Lewis, an uninterrupted week of being with him and loving him.

Distance does not lend enchantment, she thought, thinking of the weeks of separation, the two months when all she had of Lewis was his letters. Absence had not diminished her love for him, but, sometimes, she was not able to capture the image of his face. She knew that in the first few minutes of meeting him again there would be constraint and hesitation; it would be like meeting a stranger.

She looked out of the train window at the familiar landscape. Summer had lingered into September; the blaze of autumn had not yet consumed or even touched the greenness. What a summer it had been! Allison thought. What had begun in beauty and fruitfulness had ended with Selena found wandering, dazed, lost and helpless, by the side of a road. Mike had been fired. And Seth Buswell and Matt Swain had made enemies trying to help her.

Peyton Place had been a battlefield. Allison wondered whether she was fleeing in defeat or departing victorious. A little of both, she thought. Mike had got a job and she, at least, had not surrendered to the pressures. Her career was in full flower, her success had gone far beyond even her wildest dream.

Allison had never thought of success in terms of money. To her, it had always been a vague, amorphous dream with success consisting, in equal parts, of fame and freedom. Money was the least important part of it. Often she said to

herself, I am a rich woman. It was an attempt at convincing herself of this fact, but it was an attempt that always failed. She never believed it, she could not think of herself that way.

Only *old* women are rich, she told herself, trying to push away the thought of herself, Allison MacKenzie, as a rich woman. It was an image she was not willing to face and thought the reason for it was that it interfered with an image she preferred: herself as a writer; as Allison MacKenzie, Author.

She did not want to be a corporate entity, endlessly involved with the investment counsellors and tax accountants that Brad had been recommending to her. One of the things she had to do while in New York was to see these people. She had decided that the only way to handle this was to find people she could trust, and turn it all over to them. She did not want to be bothered with it. To think of money matters took one's mind from the writing of books, and that was her real work.

Perhaps David was right. He may have been motivated by all the wrong reasons, but perhaps what he said was correct. The writer's only function is to write. From now on, she determined, that's the way it's going to be. No more interviews, no more salesmanship.

The conductor punched her ticket and made a few remarks about the kind of summer it had been. I've practically become a commuter, Allison thought, between Peyton Place and New York. She looked around her at the faded green plush seats, most of them empty. She felt almost proprietary about this train.

She had an imaginary conversation with Lewis in which she said, "We should all take more train rides, Lewis. It's one of the few places left where we can commune with ourselves and ask the deep questions and make judgments of ourselves and others. It's too dangerous to think of anything but the traffic when you're in a car; and 'planes are too fast."

Allison put her head back on the seat and closed her eyes,

gave herself up to delicious thoughts of her reunion with Lewis. Love's hungers, she thought, are as real as any other kind.

She smiled, thinking what Constance would say if she knew that Allison had become involved with a married man. Constance, remembering her own past history, would think it was a family curse, a seed she had transmitted to Allison, and she would feel guilty and responsible.

That is the difference between our generations, Allison thought. Her mother had felt guilty, had felt a sense of sin at being the mistress of a married man. Allison did not. She accepted it; it was an arrangement; it was the best thing that life had thus far offered her.

Allison sat up, startled by her thoughts. *Thus far?* Was she admitting to herself that what she had with Lewis was just a temporary thing, to be superseded by something better, more permanent? She pushed the thought aside, denied the possibility of it. I am not a gipsy, she told herself, not a wanderer. I have found what I want, Lewis is what I want, and I'm going to hold on to it.

At Boston she changed trains. Walking through the station, she smiled to herself. The world-weary traveller, that's what I am. Such a short time ago, this trip from Peyton Place to New York had been an exciting, new experience, a dream come true. But already it was something she could do with her eyes closed. Is that the way it's going to be with everything? she wondered. Is that what life is?

From Grand Central Station she went directly to the residential hotel where she had reserved an apartment. Driving up Park Avenue, her luggage all around her, she tried to keep from her face the smug smile that tugged her lips. Oh, give in to it, she told herself. Relax that tight New England conscience of yours. After all, no one gave you this, it wasn't handed to you on a silver platter. You earned it with your own two hands. Now enjoy it.

Her apartment was on the twentieth floor. Following the boy who carried the luggage, bowed in by the manager, she entered a grand living-room all white and gold. The

manager hustled after her, opened the long windows that led to the terrace, showed her the bedroom which was only a little smaller than the living-room, and led her to the butler's pantry where she could, if she wished, do her own cooking.

When she was alone, she looked at herself in the long mirror, as if to assure herself that it was really she, Allison MacKenzie, in this place. Then she went to the 'phone and called Lewis.

"I am here," she said. "Come to dinner."

"Must I wait till then?" he asked. "I could sneak out the back door. I think it still opens, though I haven't used it since 1936 when the bill collectors used to sit and wait for me in the reception room."

"Oh, how I wish I had been around then, darling."

"I wish it too. You would have charmed them right out of the place, the bills forgotten in their hands. Listen, darling, I know I'm being terribly undisciplined and all my authors are going to start writing me angry letters, but I'm leaving right now and I'll be there in fifteen minutes."

"Oh yes, darling, come at once," she said. And hung up before she could add, 'We have no time to waste'. The thought had come unbidden, from nowhere.

She undressed quickly. She wanted to shower and dress and be ready for him. She planned on ordering dinner and having it served on the terrace, with candles on the table and a bucket of champagne, able to see all of New York yet remaining unseen. That their life together was secret made it all the more delicious, she thought.

But when he knocked on the door she was not ready and had to pull on a terrycloth robe, the ends of her hair still wet, her face washed clean of make-up.

"Don't look at me, Lewis. I'm not ready to be seen."

He laughed. "That's like telling a thirsty man to stay away from the water."

He put his hand on her arm and drew her towards him. When they kissed, Allison went limp in his arms and cried, "Oh, Lewis, how I've missed you!"

"If it was anything like the way I missed you, then I understand full well what you've gone through."

Allison drew away from him and said, "Oh; Lewis, I wanted to be dressed when you arrived, and made up, and looking my best. And now look at me."

"I am," Lewis said.

"I wanted to order dinner and have the table on the terrace, with crystal and candles and champagne."

"We'll have it later," Lewis said, smiling his quiet smile.

When he kissed her again, his hand was inside her robe, cupping her breast; and then, arms around each other, hurrying, they moved towards the bedroom. Allison's knees felt weak and her thighs trembled.

"Oh, hold me, darling," she cried. "Don't ever let me go."

"Never," he said, and the word echoed in his head.

Never, she thought, repeating the word to herself. Lovers are mad, they use crazy, impossible words. What's worse, they believe them.

She buried her face in Lewis's breast in order to shut out the sight of him, of his grey hairs that were the sign of age. She could feel his heart beating against her mouth. *Never* will last only as long as that, she thought, and began to cry.

"What is it, love? What is it?" Lewis asked. "Why are you crying?" He stroked her hair and her back, calming her as a father does a child.

"It's nothing, Lewis. It's nothing." And she took his head between her hands and consumed him with kisses, as if she wanted to make up for all the years that she had not known him, all the years she had not even been born, by the intensity of her love.

Allison was assailed by the thought that there was no time to lose; and that because of the disparity in ages, she must cram into a short space all the love and experience that the years had denied them. She caressed him with her hands and her mouth, and under her hands felt the quiver of his pleasure. She assaulted him with love, with a passionate fury; and when he was ready for her, he turned on her

savagely and threw her down, covered her with his hard body, and held her arms pinned to the bed so that she could not move. Like a sea's retaining wall she lay and allowed herself to be buffeted, and felt the tidal pull that, at the end, seemed to draw her soul out of her body. Only then did he let go of her and she drew his throbbing body down to hers.

This is the only truth there is, she thought, this expression of love. The rest is acting out a part.

Her body ached with the knowledge of him. They lay side by side, resting, and Allison watched day slowly dimming and the room receding into darkness. The days were shorter now. Summer was ending gracefully, with days of sweet, soft winds, but winter's advance was making itself tentatively felt. Remembering that soon she would leave for California, Allison thought, I am going to follow summer west; I'll have a few extra weeks of it.

At the thought of leaving, she turned to Lewis and kissed him.

"How are you feeling, darling?" she asked.

"There's a possibility I may recover," he said. "I believe there are some grounds for hope. If I take good care of myself, I might be able to walk out of here under my own power—sometime around ten-thirty tomorrow morning."

Allison laughed. "You'd better summon up all your strength right now, Lewis, because I suspect my reputation will suffer if the waiter walks in and finds you like this."

Lewis sat up. "What waiter?"

"The waiter who is going to bring our dinner." She reached for the 'phone. "I am about to order dinner, Lewis. Have you any special requests?"

"Yes, I have," Lewis said, jumping out of bed and running to the bathroom. "Wait till I'm dressed."

An hour later, when the manager, head waiter and waiter arrived—the waiter pushing a cart containing their dinner under covered dishes—Allison and Lewis were sitting, all prim and proper, on the terrace's white wrought-iron chairs.

The head waiter opened the champagne, the waiter

served their food without rattling a single dish and the manager stood anxiously by; he was the kind of man, Allison thought, who seemed always to be fearing the worst. After the waiter had placed before them the bowls of cold vichyssoise, set in larger crystal bowls filled with cracked ice, Allison said, "I will serve the rest myself."

The waiter and the head waiter bowed themselves off the terrace; the manager took one last worried look, as if he half expected the terrace to fall off the side of the building. Assuring himself it would last a few days more, he wished them *bon appétit* and followed his waiters from the room.

Allison said, "He gives me the feeling that he's terribly sorry New England doesn't have a king and a flag. I think he'd like to fly the flag to announce that I am here."

Lewis was still smiling at the sight of the three men backing out of the room. "New York is full of apparitions," he said. "It's become the final resting place of the ghosts of half of Europe. Those three men, for example, died in Budapest in 1935. New York is the Paradise their souls migrated to."

"The chef's ghost has done well by us tonight," Allison said.

After the cold soup, there was filet mignon with sauce Bearnaise, artichokes vinaigrette and a small salad pungent with herbs. They finished the champagne with tiny wild strawberries that tasted of sun and summer fields.

Standing at the parapet with their coffee cups, they looked at New York, winking and flashing around them. That is what it's all for, Allison thought, not knowing quite what the words meant. Moments like this make the agony of success worthwhile. But immediately she asked herself, Is it true? Does this make up for the lies and the estrangement of friends?

She thought of David. It pained her to think of him, in his lonely room, only a few minutes away, bent over his work. Perhaps she had misjudged him. Perhaps his integrity was real and his anger with her was genuine, not envy of her success but outrage that success was what she wanted. He believed in her talent. She decided she would

black coffee. She ate a country girl's breakfast of fried eggs, bacon, fruit and coffee with cream.

She was glad she had wakened early. Allison hated to hurry the first meal of the day, loved to linger over the breakfast cigarettes that tasted better than any other. She watched the city wake up. Standing at the parapet, she saw the water truck's white spray; it left the surface of the street a little darker, if not much cleaner.

Beginning at eight-thirty, more and more men and women left apartment buildings and were swallowed up by the omnivorous subway entrance at the corner. Allison smiled, amused to observe that as the hour approached closer to nine, the men and women walked ever more quickly.

At ten, dressed in a tweed suit with a jacket cut like an elegant cardigan, Allison stepped into a waiting taxi, the door closed behind by the hotel doorman.

The driver said, "You know something, lady? Doormen at good hotels are the only people who know how to close taxi doors. They don't slam 'em but they always get it closed on the first try. My taxis would last a lot longer if people knew how to close the doors."

Allison spent the morning in panelled offices, putting into the hands of lawyers and investment men her now considerable earnings. She nodded as they explained things to her; but, no matter how closely she tried to listen, her mind drifted on to other things. But she knew they were honest and capable men; it did not matter that she didn't understand. Perhaps it was better, she thought; at least, I won't be an interfering amateur. Things like this are better left to the pros.

She went shopping in the afternoon and bought the kind of clothes and lingerie she had only looked at before. She ordered suits and dresses that bore the labels that meant money. The floor managers invariably recognized her; charge accounts were immediately arranged.

"I can give you a cheque," Allison offered.

She laughed to herself at the thought that, now that she had money, she didn't need it.

She had only to give her address and it was sent; her name was the only currency she needed.

When she got back to her apartment, the boxes were unpacked and the contents hung in the closets by the maid. Allison kicked off her shoes and dropped down on the sofa. I'll never get used to this, she thought.

The 'phone rang. It was Stephanie. A television producer had just called. "It's a small part, Allison, but I have to take it. And rehearsals start tonight, I'm afraid. It's seven hours in a draughty theatre for me. I'd much rather be having dinner with you."

Stephanie was in a hurry. She'd call tomorrow, she said, and they'd make a date for lunch.

I adore Stephanie, Allison thought. She's practically the only one to whom my success hasn't made a bit of difference. Some people seemed to feel that there was just so much success around and that if their friends won any part of it, that left less for them. It was an attitude Allison could not understand.

I could understand it, she thought, if I had just picked a winning number in the sweepstakes, or a rich uncle in Australia had died and left me everything he owned which included half of Australia. But I worked for everything I have. Nobody gave it to me. She remembered the bitter, vicious letters she had received, hundreds of them, from people who thought that her success made their success less possible of achieving.

She sighed, stirred herself to a sitting position and 'phoned Lewis. She told him about her day and that only David would be coming to dinner because Stephanie had got a part. "Won't you change your mind and come, darling?"

"I'll 'phone you at midnight. Perhaps if you're not too tired then, I'll come over. Have a pleasant evening with David, darling. He can give you a lot of information ab Hollywood, you know. He was there for a while. I do know how helpful it'll be, though. He has a pretty jaundi view of it. But we'll talk about that later."

After she had spoken to Lewis, she called Room Service and ordered dinner for two, to be served at eight o'clock.

Before David arrived, she drew a bath and sprinkled it with lavender scent. In the bottle, the drops were amber, but in the bath water they turned to a smoky purple. She was enclosed by the fragrance.

When David came, he found her wearing a simple black dress, its severity relieved only by the rich velvet piping around the cuffs. Her hair was pulled back.

She looked older, he thought, and more beautiful than ever before.

"I was surprised when you called this morning, Allison. And terribly pleased, of course. I want to thank you for ending this ridiculous situation. It was all my fault. That day we met in the coffeehouse—well, to put it bluntly, Allison—I was jealous. I gave myself all sorts of other reasons for what I was feeling, but it was plain, old-fashioned jealousy and nothing else. Forgive me, Allison."

"There's nothing to forgive, David. Let's have a drink and a long evening of talk. We'll drown it all in talk."

After dinner, over coffee on the terrace, the talk turned to Allison's coming trip to Hollywood. By that time, all constraint between them had been dissipated by the good food and the wine that had been chilled to just the right temperature. The hovering Hungarian ghosts had done their job well; and, at ten o'clock, they evaporated, taking the food cart with them, leaving David and Allison with their coffee and brandy.

"You'll hate it out there," David said. "Hollywood is filled with haberdashers who made good, and men who call themselves writers though they've never had an original thought in their lives."

"Nevertheless, I'm going," said Allison. "Brad has already told them so."

"Just what are you supposed to be going there for?" asked David.

"I'm to be technical adviser for the film. I'm going to

give the script writer a few pointers and talk with the costume and set designers. Things like that."

"Allison," said David earnestly, "they're making a fool out of you. They don't need you to tell them anything. All they want is to make use of you, to exploit your publicity value for their own ends. They'll make you feel important, invite you to a few parties, flatter the hell out of you so that you can come back East and tell everyone who'll listen what a swell bunch of people they are out on the coast."

Allison laughed. "Well, if that's all they want, they're certainly willing to pay a good price for it. Twenty-five hundred a week plus all my expenses."

David shrugged. "You won't like it, Allison. I'm sure you won't."

"Maybe not, David, but I've got to find out for myself. I want every experience that's offered me—or just about."

"I'm only thinking of you," David said. "Wait until they start ripping your book to pieces. You'll feel differently then. You won't be able to stand it. Nobody could."

"I don't have your sensitive, artistic soul," said Allison. "As far as I'm concerned, all I want for *Samuel's Castle* is another forty weeks on the lists. And after what they paid me for the picture rights, they can do anything they damned well please with it."

"I just don't want you to be hurt," said David quietly, and Allison was suddenly ashamed.

"I know it, David," she said contritely. "But I have to find out for myself."

"Let me hear from you," said David.

"Yes," said Allison. "I'll 'phone you. With the studio paying my hotel bills, I'll be able to do it with a clear conscience."

David smiled. "You've changed a lot, Allison. But basically you're still the little girl from Peyton Place, still keeping your conscience clear. I don't think you could change that part of you if you submitted to surgery."

THE HOTEL was a huge, ten-tiered semi-circle made of white stone and glass and it sat in the middle of vast manicured lawns that were dotted with symmetrical, evenly spaced flower beds.

Allison stood on the terrace outside her ninth-floor suite and thought, I wonder if anything ever gets dirty in Beverly Hills. It was ten o'clock in the morning and everything below, beyond and behind her sparkled as if the world had just been removed from a tissue-filled gift box.

In the room behind her, the telephone rang, and she stepped through the floor-to-ceiling glass doors and went to answer it. The room itself was like a theatrical set, all modern furniture, white rugs and abstract paintings. The furniture was upholstered in a deep royal purple and the linen drapes over the sliding glass doors matched exactly.

"Hello," said Allison into the white telephone receiver.

"Are you ready?" asked Bradley Holmes.

"As much as I'll ever be," said Allison. "I've been standing here admiring my surroundings and I can't quite figure out whether I'm living inside a frosted wedding cake or a purple Easter basket."

Brad laughed. "Wait until you see the studio," he said. "That'll really give you something to think about."

"I can't wait," said Allison. "Are you on your way down?"

"Right there," replied Brad and hung up.

A few minutes later there was a knock at her door and he came into her room.

"This is indeed very plush," said Brad, looking around. "The denizens of Glitterville have done right well by you. Naturally, my room is not anywhere near this fancy, but then, I'm paying for mine."

Allison put on her hat and a fresh pair of white gloves.

"You don't like Hollywood much, do you?" she asked.

"Nobody from New York likes Hollywood," replied Brad, as they walked down the hall towards the elevators. "Of course, half the time it's a pose. New Yorkers who'd give their eyes to be called to Hollywood are the ones who scream the loudest about prostitution and lack of artistry in the films. No, I don't like Hollywood, but I keep my mouth shut about it. They keep a great deal of money out here and I enjoy getting my share of it."

"David hated it out here," said Allison.

"Yes, he did," replied Brad. "But, on the other hand, David is never going to get rich. It all comes down to what a person wants from life."

A Cadillac limousine pulled up in front of the main entrance of the hotel and a uniformed chauffeur got out to hold the back door of the car open for Allison and Brad.

"You see," said Brad, "the little niceties, such as being driven about in a car like this, cost money. If one wants things like this, one must sacrifice something. David was never willing to give an inch. I was out here with him a few years ago. He was impossible. Miracle Pictures had paid him a very decent price for his third book in spite of the fact that the hard-cover edition never went over three thousand copies. They wanted David to help on the script. Well, we came out here, David and I, and, let me tell you, I never want to spend another such two weeks. David was unbending, unyielding and absolutely deaf to all suggestions made by the producer, the director and the other writers. We were supposed to be here for eight weeks, but at the end of two David went out and got drunk and took a 'plane to New York. Believe me, it wasn't easy explaining that to the studio. But in the end, they decided that they were better off without him."

"He thought I shouldn't come out here," said Allison.

"I can imagine," said Brad. "Listen, dad, I know why you bother with people like David."

"Shall I pour?" she asked.

"Yes, if you please, Miss Muir," said Mr Tishman.

A quiet little ceremony followed during which all the men stood silently while Miss Muir filled cups from the silver pot.

"Now, then, Miss MacKenzie," said Mr Tishman, leaning back comfortably in his chair. "By the way, may I call you Allison?"

"Please do," Allison replied.

"Good. Puts things on a friendly, warm basis. I'm Arthur, and," he waved a vague hand in the direction of the writer and director, "they're Joel and Conrad. Well, Allison, we've all been very busy on your book and already have a script of sorts."

Allison glanced at Joel Parkinson, but the writer did not look up. He just sat and looked sadder than ever.

"I'd like to see the script," said Allison.

"Certainly," said Arthur Tishman. "We want you to take a copy along with you when you leave. Read it tonight and tomorrow we'll get together again and discuss things. But please don't think that what we have now is what I call a good, working script. It isn't. Joel here had just been putting down ideas. We've got a long way to go yet, but I do think, and Conrad agrees, that Joel has given us a good base to start working on. Our final script will follow the same lines as the one we have now, but I'm sure that, as a writer yourself, you understand the long, slow process of finishing and polishing."

At first, Arthur Tishman gave the impression of a man who is accustomed to command, and Allison was a little frightened of him. But she soon realized that her presence, meeting her, had made him nervous. As a result, he did not converse but made speeches; it was as if he had it all written down, and then read the lines badly, like an amateur actor.

Allison was familiar with the Tishman legend. He had come up the hard way; everything he had he had made himself. She felt a feeling of kinship with him.

"Now, that's enough business for today," said Arthur Tishman. "We have a busy week plotted for you, my dear.

Later today, you have a meeting with Harold Jenks, our publicity man. The papers have been on his neck ever since they heard you were coming. Then, tomorrow morning, we've made a date for you with one of our best photographers, and tomorrow afternoon we want you to go on a tour of the studio. Sort of to get the feeling of the way we work here. Then tomorrow night, there is to be a dinner party for you at my home. Everyone connected with the picture will be there, and a lot of other important people, too. We're all looking forward to it."

"But I had planned——" began Allison.

Brad stood up. "Wonderful, Arthur," he said. "As usual, you've done everything that has to be done very efficiently."

"It's the way we have to work," Arthur said. "Efficiency prevents ulcers. That's my own secret success formula, which I reveal to everyone."

Allison was back in the car sitting next to Brad before it occurred to her that neither Conrad Blanding nor Joel Parkinson had spoken one word to her, once the producer had begun to speak about the script.

"There," said Brad, as the car pulled away. "Painless, wasn't it?"

"Yes," agreed Allison, "but we didn't accomplish much."

"Wait," said Brad. "You'll have plenty to do when things get rolling."

The car stopped in front of a stone building that looked like a post office in a medium-sized city. Brad helped Allison out and led the way to Harold Jenks's office.

Harold Jenks was short and pot-bellied with dark curly hair and a beaked nose that would have gladdened the heart of a Nazi cartoonist.

"Howarya?" he asked, not rising from behind his desk as Brad introduced Allison.

"Fine, thank you," said Allison.

"Sit down, sit down," said Jenks, indicating a chair.

"Just get in?"

"No," said Allison. "We arrived last night."

"Met Tishman?"

"Yes. Earlier this afternoon. Before we came here."

"You're cute," said Jenks. "Clean-cut and all that. Should be able to do something with that." He looked Allison over thoroughly, then he pressed a key on the box that sat on his desk. "Send Joe Borden in here," he said. A man came into the room, but Jenks did not introduce him to Allison. He merely waved in her direction. "Allison MacKenzie," he said, as if she were merchandise on a store counter. "Writes books. We've got to get something ready for the papers. Take her out and show her around a bit. Get a line on her and give me something before she leaves."

Allison felt now, not only like merchandise on a counter, but merchandise that had been rejected by a prospective customer.

"Better get a few pictures," said Jenks, glancing at his watch. "Can't have the papers doing it on their own. Go over to Photography with her now."

"But Mr Tishman said that I'm supposed to do that tomorrow morning," said Allison. "I can't be photographed today. My hair's a mess and I'm all wrinkled and my gloves are soiled."

Jenks laughed. "We've got people who get paid to worry about details like that," he said. "Go on. Go with Borden. He'll take care of everything."

"But I don't like to have my picture taken," said Allison. "It's bad enough in the morning, but——"

Jenks put his hands, palms down, on his desk with a gesture of infinite patience.

"Look," he said, "sitting in the same chair you're sitting in now I've had all the big names in the business. Monroe, Turner, Hayworth. All of 'em. I know what I'm doing. Just don't give me a hard time and I'll do a good job for you."

And he will too, Allison thought, finally impressed with Jenks's professionalism. He was the kind of man, met all too rarely, who knew his job, every part of it, better than anyone else. Like Tishman, Jenks was quite clearly not a man who held his job because he was somebody's brother-in-law. In

Hollywood, the day of the brother-in-law ended with the birth of television. They're probably all working at the TV studios now, Allison thought.

Allison was combed, made up and photographed. Then she was recombed and rephotographed. The photographer looked at her as if she were something under a microscope and mumbled things to himself, and by the time it was over Allison was almost in tears.

"I wish I'd never come!" she cried as the car drove back towards the hotel. "David was right."

"There, there," Brad consoled. "You're just tired, Allison. You'll feel better after a drink and a good dinner."

At nine-thirty that evening, Allison finished the last of her dessert and looked gratefully at Brad.

"You were right," she said. "I have been acting like a child. Just pet me and feed me and I'm all smiles again. Disgusting, isn't it?"

Brad laughed. "You're wonderful," he said. "With just the right amount of temperament to make you exciting."

"The only thing that excites me now is the thought of a good, hot bath and a nice, soft bed," said Allison.

"Are you going to read the script?" asked Brad.

"While I'm soaking in the tub," replied Allison.

"I'll call you at nine-thirty in the morning," said Brad as they left the dining-room. "We'll have breakfast together."

Ten minutes later, Allison drew a tub of very hot water, perfumed it lavishly with bath oil and prepared to soak, relax and read. An hour later, when she had finished the script, she was far from relaxed. Joel Parkinson had left out of his script what Allison considered some of the best parts of her novel; instead, there were pages and pages of inane dialogue and hollow characterization.

I mustn't care, thought Allison, tears streaming down her face. I *won't* care. They bought it and now it's theirs to do with as they see fit. I'm not entitled to care.

But she did care, and with the caring went the only defence that she had been able to build against a world suddenly too much aware of her. She had constructed her wall

"No, I haven't read *Samuel's Castle*," she heard one woman, who had referred to the book on her television programme as 'exciting', telling her companion. "I glanced through it, but, my dear, what a bore!"

The head of a television network, who had tried to buy the rights of the book for a ninety-minute spectacular and had been turned down by Bradley Holmes, gave an interview to a national magazine in which he said, "I dread to think what a number of good books have been ignored while *Samuel's Castle* has clung to the top of the best-seller list."

It was only with Lewis that Allison could let down the barriers a little, and even with him she was careful not to reveal how much she was hurt. For the most part, she did her weeping alone.

"The public loves to create a hero," Lewis had said. "Sometimes I think they do it for the sheer joy of knocking him down from the highest peak. Like a child who builds a house of blocks and then destroys it with one vicious kick."

"I don't care," Allison had cried with forced gaiety. "It's wonderful to be famous while it lasts. And I don't really care that much what anyone says about the book. I don't really care at all."

Allison wept without sound into the pillow on her bed.

I don't care, she cried. Century bought it. I took their money. It's theirs, and I don't care what they do with it.

AT NINE-THIRTY the next morning, when Bradley Holmes joined her for breakfast, Allison MacKenzie looked as if she had never shed a tear in her life.

"Did you read the script?" asked Brad, sipping his coffee.

"Yes."

"How did it strike you?"

"As the biggest piece of foolishness one man could possibly get down on paper," said Allison. "If he worked really hard at it, that is."

"Well, it's not the end of the world," said Brad. "Arthur told you that it was only their first effort."

"He also said that the basis they have now will remain the same," said Allison angrily. "If that's so, they're going to be laughed out of every theatre in America."

"Come now," said Brad. "It can't be that bad."

Allison shrugged. "See for yourself," she said.

"No time," said Brad, glancing at his watch. "We have to get started for the studio."

"I'd just as soon get started for the airport, if you don't mind," said Allison. "The sooner we leave here the better."

"You sound like David Noyes," said Brad. "Come on, Allison, cheer up."

She found it impossible to do so. All the way out to the studio, she sat in the back of the limousine in a little world of her own. It was a world of rancour. She hated Hollywood, Tishman, the writer, the director. All she could think of was that Tishman had bought her book because he admired it and thought it would make a great film; but he had bought it only to change it. She thought of the flat, platitudinous lines of dialogue and shuddered. The film would be called *Samuel's Castle*, her name would be listed on the credits; but it had nothing to do with her.

And yet, it would. She knew that in Tishman's Hollywood world, as in the Broadway world, no matter how remote was your connection with a flop—even if you were only the author of the book and had nothing to do with the adaptation—you were still considered to be partly responsible for it.

Having read Tishman's script, she had no doubt that the film would be a flop, that it would be laughed off the screen, that audiences would be so bored by it they'd leave their popcorn behind and flee the theatre.

When she and Brad entered Tishman's studio, he was at his desk going through a loose-leaf folder containing the costume designer's preliminary sketches. On the margins of each sheet he wrote comments in red ink. Allison noted that he had the calligraphic handwriting that always reminded her of monastic orders, of dedicated men working alone. So much for handwriting analysis, she thought; Tishman was no monk, and Hollywood was a million miles from the nearest monastery.

Arthur Tishman looked closely at Allison from under his heavy, hooded eyelids. He swung his chair around and, in a sudden movement, stood up.

"Brad," he said, "why don't you go over to Publicity and look over what Jenks has prepared. I'd like to take Allison and show her around the lot."

"Of course, Arthur," Brad said. "That's a very good idea."

Allison looked at Brad and thought, You've missed your calling; you'd have made a perfect Yes man.

When Brad had gone, Arthur turned to Allison. He moved towards the door and she found herself following him.

"Do you mind walking?" he said.

"I like walking," Allison told him.

"I like it, too. But it takes too long," he said.

Then he was silent. Allison walked along beside him, thinking, What kind of man is this? He has the handwriting of a monk, dresses like a man from Mars—today he wore a

"You've seen this saloon in a hundred movies. Each time it looked a little different. A few minor changes, a change of lighting, a change of faces, and it becomes a new place. All you need are creative film makers with a new way of looking at things, and the most familiar object or place can be made to look strange to you."

He crossed the room and sat down next to her.

"I want to tell you, Allison, that I know how you feel about the script. You think we've ruined your book. And you say to yourself, I don't care that they've ruined my book but they haven't even made a good script out of the ruins. It's all dull, flat and unimaginative."

Allison opened her mouth to speak, but Arthur went on.

"A lot of skills go into the making of a film, Allison. But after twenty years in this place I've come to the conclusion that the most valuable skill of all is the ability to read a script. To read it, see it and hear it. All at once. And then to be able to judge; will this script make a good movie, or just another mediocre movie?"

He stood up and began to pace restlessly around the tables, then stopped with his back to the swinging doors.

"It's difficult to explain all this, Allison. You read our script like a novelist. You can't. You've got to read it like a sound camera. A sound camera with an imaginative human brain. Listen, Allison. You've heard the expression, 'the magic of the theatre'?"

Allison nodded.

"When idiots use that expression, they mean the 'glamour' of the theatre, its aura, its spectacular appeal. But when theatre workers talk about 'magic', they mean something altogether different. To them, 'magic' is the odd, mysterious, inexplicable thing that happens between a director and his actors. The magical thing is that those lines you consider to be dull and innocuous suddenly become meaningful, and reveal qualities you never suspected were there. You make a great mistake to expect that a film script must be literary. In a sense, it must *never* be literary. It has got to have *extra-literary* qua"

He came and sat down across the table from her. "What you are looking for is a script that reads like a novel. What I am looking for, always, is a script that reads like a movie. Allison, I'm an old pro. I know what I'm talking about. If I didn't, I'd have been thrown off this lot years ago. Are you going to take my word for it?"

Allison did not answer. All she could think of was her mutilated novel. She walked to the window and looked out. She saw, walking down the dusty street, a group of white-robed, barefooted men. One of them was leading a white donkey. They were on their way to the lot where a Biblical movie was being made.

It was one of the strangest sights she had ever seen, these early Christians walking through a town of the American West. It was all wrong, yet out here it made sense. She realized suddenly that these people could do anything, that on the outskirts of Los Angeles they could, if they wanted to, create New York or a planetary city of the future. They had worked their magic on her since she was a little girl. Why did she suddenly begin to doubt them now?

She turned and smiled at Arthur. "I think I've been suffering from Novelist's Disease. It's what other people call arrogance. We work alone so much that we begin to think we are the only creative people in the world. And, what's worse, that we don't need anyone else."

"Only hacks don't take pride in their work," Arthur said.

He took her arm and they began to walk back towards the administration buildings. At the open door of a sound stage, two ladies in waiting at the court of the Empress Eugénie, wearing ball gowns and powdered wigs, were talking about their favourite rock-and-roll singer. For the first time, Allison began to feel the excitement of Hollywood's creativity and, listening to Arthur, began to have some understanding of the technical aspect of film work.

"We expect to wind up with a great film, Allison," Arthur told her as he helped her into the car. "Not just a good film, but a great one. Tomorrow we'll have an office ready for you. I want to hear all the ideas you've got."

The driver picked up Brad outside Jenks's office. Brad got into the car and handed Allison a large manilla envelope. "Your photos," he said, smiling.

She opened the envelope and took them out. She hardly recognized herself. It was her own face, but somehow it had been invested with mystery, with glamour and with a kind of beauty she had never seen in any mirror. She smiled to herself and thought, The magic is even working on me.

She said to Brad, "That lens looked at me with a lover's eyes."

She quickly stuffed the photographs back into the envelope. For some reason, it embarrassed her to look at them; it was as if she had been caught in a fraudulent act.

By her second week in Hollywood, Allison had had to throw out of the window every preconception she had brought along with her. It was true that there were more swimming pools in Beverly Hills than in any other town in the world, the houses and grounds were the most fanciful copies of Spanish castles and English manor houses, and without doubt Hollywood attracted to itself the most beautiful women—and even beautiful men—from every part of the world.

But the overriding fact about Hollywood, what made the trappings unimportant, was the work of making movies. She never anywhere saw people work with such energy, with such furious drive. It carried over into their private lives; there was the same kind of driving energy in their love affairs and their marriages and in the way they relaxed.

Making movies was for Hollywood what making automobiles was to Detroit. From the window of her office she could see a large area of the studio lot, the trucks and motorized freight wagons that plied endlessly up and down the studio streets, carrying scenery and costumes. Hundreds of men moved about, each performing an assigned task, hundreds of extras and a handful of highly paid actors and directors committed themselves and their reputations to film.

Allison sat at her desk and spent the first week reading the

script. She read it now with new eyes; eyes that had been opened and made more knowledgeable because Tishman had shared with her some of the knowledge that only years of working in film can give.

Parts of the script that, on first reading, had seemed to her arbitrary and capricious, she now saw as reasonable changes.

They had changed the time scheme of her novel. She had thought them stupid for doing so. But now, she understood the reason for making a scene she had set in summer take place in winter. The coldness, the bleak landscape, the white and black of snow and bare trees, all this would heighten the mood and give the sequence precisely the emotional overtones it needed.

She met with the set designer and the costume department and gave her opinions on their work. She found only minor errors, the kind of thing no one would notice except the experts who looked for such mistakes.

She left the studio at five every day and returned to her hotel. It was not the studio but the hotel that was the Hollywood of every small-town girl's imagining. In the lobby and around the pool sat the beautiful girls who were not waiting to be discovered but working very hard at it. And there were the rich widows, elderly women who spent hours each day in beauty salons, and who were always accompanied by handsome young men.

Allison was soon able to spot an agent by the way he walked, and could tell at a glance whether a man was an unemployed writer or a director waiting for an assignment. In a very short time she had learned all the gossip and knew as the waitresses in the dining-room knew, why the famous star was *really* getting her divorce, and who the other man *really* was.

Lewis called Allison every evening. They spoke for five or ten minutes and hurried to say all they wanted to say to each other, spoke of their love and their plans and what each had done that day. Until the day finally came when Allison was able to say, "Oh, Lewis, tomorrow is the last day and I can come back to you!" She had her reservation

for six o'clock the next evening, she would be in New York, with Lewis, in the morning.

The night before she left, Arthur Tishman gave a party for her. He wanted her to meet Rita Moore, especially, knowing she was a favourite of Allison's.

Brad had returned to New York at the end of the first week. Allison rode alone in the back seat of the studio limousine, her elbow on the arm rest, smoking a cigarette. She smiled. I'm acting as calmly, she thought, as if I've done this sort of thing all my life.

She wore a simple, sheathlike black gown; her hair was drawn back; a small diamond clip was her only ornament. It was the only jewellery she had bought herself, thus far, with her new money. She always referred to it, to herself, as new money. She had seen the clip one day in the window of a Beverly Hills jeweller's and walked in and bought it. She knew that whatever might come in the future, this clip would always be her favourite, because it was the first and because it had been bought with money made from her first success. As the car drove up the gravelled drive to Arthur Tishman's house, she touched the clip; it gave her assurance.

Tishman's house was one of the great old houses. It was not California modern; it looked like one of the houses in an old Long Island suburb. It was an extravagant relic, a dinosaur from the ice-age of Doug and Mary; it was a proud reminder of Hollywood's regal past.

Architecturally, it was part Spanish, part Tudor; yet this did not, somehow, result in a hodgepodge. As is so often the case with early twentieth-century American houses, the architect's vulgarity had, over the years, become charming. It was a place, Allison decided, that she would enjoy living in. It had not the look of the post-war houses; she thought them mean and inhospitable with their functional little rooms and uncomfortably low ceilings.

The car came to a stop at a graceful flight of stone steps with low risers and a carved balustrade. Arthur came down the steps and helped her out of the car.

"Don't get wise with me, sweetie," said Rita. "I've been there, and I know. Where the hell do you think I sprung from? Well, I'll tell you. From a lousy shack in the backwoods of Georgia. My old man was a sharecropper and my mother was worn out and tired before she even married him. Her father had been a sharecropper, too, and all she ever knew was work, work and more work. And kids and filth and no money and a constant hole in your belly from being hungry. I never had a pair of shoes on my feet until I was fourteen, and even then they were discards, but my mother sent me to school anyway."

She paused and drank deeply and refilled the glass. "I don't know what sets anybody else off," she said. "But I know what it was with me. We had a teacher at school who was a real old bag. She didn't have any more business teaching than I'd have, but with her shape and face I guess she couldn't do anything else. She reminded me of a wrinkled-up old prune, but she taught us geography. One day she was telling us about Paris, and she got a kind of look on her face that made her almost good-looking for a minute. She showed us pictures, too. The most beautiful pictures I'd ever seen in my life, and she told us about the trip in a ship that got you there."

She leaned her head back and looked up at the ceiling, as if to look back into the past more comfortably. "Right then and there I made up my mind that I was going to Paris, but I was still a kid and too dumb to keep my mouth shut about it. I told her and she laughed at me. She told me that sharecroppers' kids never got out of Georgia, let alone make trips to Europe. But I knew better. I was going to Paris. And I did, too. Five years ago. With four trunks and sixteen suitcases and two maids and a poodle. I stood under the Arc de Triomphe and thought of that old bitch back in Georgia and thumbed my nose at her. I'd made it and I'd come first class all the way. I was with my third husband then. Jay Keating. You've heard of him, I suppose."

"Yes," said Allison. "I've heard of him. He's an English actor."

"English my foot," said Rita. "He was born in South Dakota. He was a pansy on top of everything else."

"A what?" said Allison.

"Pansy," said Rita. "A real fruit. I caught him in my stateroom with the ship's purser on the trip home. But you never would have read that in any fan magazine. We called it incompatibility and I went to Reno for a divorce. Heigh-ho, and so much for number three." She raised her glass. "Here's to success. It's what you tell yourself you have when it dawns on you that you haven't got anything else."

"It doesn't have to be like that," said Allison. "I've heard of plenty of people who are successful and happily married besides."

"Maybe," said Rita. "If the man is as successful as the woman. It doesn't work if the woman is the big name. Not once in a million times! It didn't work with me, and I guess I knew it wouldn't right from the beginning. I was married when I first began to be somebody. My first husband. Alan. A real, sweet kid. He worked for the Los Angeles Telephone Company and I married him because I kidded myself into believing I really loved him. What I was was hungry. And lonely. So Alan fed me and kept me company. When I was around. But I was going to make it and make it big and I didn't want a husband around who was going to make the road up any rockier than it was to begin with. I had a shape back then, too, and I wasn't particular who I showed it to as long as there was something in it for me. Alan didn't like the pictures he saw of me wearing a little more than a G-string and two sequins, but not much more. He crabbed when I went out with my agent and he couldn't understand that I had to be seen in the right places. He wanted me to stay home and I wanted out. So that was the end of that."

Rita smiled her mirthless smile. "I felt rotten that time. I cried for almost the whole six weeks I had to stay in Nevada, but my agent, Charlie Bloom, told me what the score was. Charlie said that I could either have a diamond

necklace around my neck or a husband. Naturally, I chose the diamonds. Do you know Charlie?"

"No," said Allison.

"He's the biggest agent in Hollywood," said Rita. "Charlie has all the big names in his stable now, but when he started out with me he was nobody. Just a smart, sharp little guy who knew all the answers and had more nerve than a brass monkey. Charlie dressed me in a tight sweater and an even tighter skirt and he taught me how to walk with a sexy jounce and how to pinch my nipples so that they'd show under the sweater. He changed my name, too. From Alice Johnson to Rita Moore. And there was a time when a man could get fired at Century if he slipped and called me Alice. Alice Johnson was a name without class. It took Hollywood ten years to find out that I could do more than stick my chest out and wiggle my backside. That's when I became An Actress. Anyway, three years ago I married John Gresham. John was a real smoothie. He played the piano and told me I had eyes that he could drown in and that my body was like a flame. So what the hell. I married him."

"Just because he was a good talker?" asked Allison.

Rita shrugged. "No. He pressured me into it."

"Oh, come now," Allison objected. "Women don't allow themselves to be pressured into a marriage they don't want."

"What the hell do you know about it?" demanded Rita.

"John was an artist, let me tell you. He knew what he was doing. The son-of-a-bitch used to make love to me for hours before we were married. He'd stroke and kiss and handle me until I thought I'd go out of my mind, but he never finished anything. He'd tell me he wanted to wait until after we were married because I was so pure and he didn't want to dishonour me by taking me without a ceremony. So I married him."

She stopped to light a cigarette. Allison could not take her eyes from her. "He was good in bed, I'll say that for him. And for a while it was great. We'd spend all day in

bed. John was an expert. But there came a day when I had to go back to work and that left John without a job. Still, he was nice to come home to. I'd walk in the door and he'd undress me and make me a drink and play with me while I drank it, and it was fun. I guess he got bored after a while, though, because last year he stopped playing with me and began to play with my money. He got away with over fifty thousand before I put a stop to it. As usual, I put the stop to it all by going to Nevada."

She turned her green eyes, searching and sad, to Allison. "So now you can go back to New York and tell your friend Paul what success is really like. You go along for years kidding yourself that if you're successful you can have everything you want, but all the time you know that the only way you can make it is alone."

Rita fixed herself another drink, and when she had done so she held the glass up to the light and squinted through the dark fluid.

"Alone," she said. "I guess that's the saddest word in the world. You stay at a hotel and order your own coffee in the morning and you hire a masseuse to rub your back and at night your bed is as big as Texas and as cold as Alaska. But you're successful." She swallowed her drink and looked at Allison. "Don't forget that, Allison. You're a success! You're a goddamned big success! And just see what it'll get you. Just you bloody well see!"

When Allison entered her hotel room, much later that night, its expensive splendour suddenly seemed tasteless and repellent. She threw her purse across the room. It struck the wall above her dressing table and fell with a crash among the bottles of perfume and jars of cream. Allison wanted to break every window and rip to shreds the royal purple curtains. She wanted to do something so wild and destructive that it would shake her back into sanity, into a realization of her true self which she now felt was lost.

She had success, more than she had ever dreamed of. But never in her life had she been so fearful of the future, so frightened of the present, as she was now

out of her rut. I don't imagine that she'll be too eager to fall in love with another stranger." Connie paused and looked searchingly at Allison. "And, speaking of love," she said at last, "what about David Noyes?"

Allison looked down into her empty coffee cup. "I don't know," she said.

She longed to tell Constance it was not David she cared about but Lewis Jackman. David, however, provided a perfect smoke screen, so she went on discussing him with Constance.

"He's in love with you, you know."

"It's not David that I don't know about," said Allison. "I'm not sure of myself."

Connie sighed. "I guess every mother wants to see her daughter safely and happily married," she said. "And I'm no different."

"David has been everywhere and has done just about everything," said Allison. "He's been on a safari in Africa and ski-ing in Switzerland and he's even had himself put in prison so that he could write a book about it. I've never been anywhere or done anything. David would be perfectly willing to get married, buy a house right here in Peyton Place and settle down to writing his books."

"But you've just been telling me that you're never happier than when you're right here," objected Connie.

"I am," agreed Allison. "But it's a selfish sort of thing. I want to be able to come home any time I want to. But I want to be able to leave, too. Any time for any place. I wouldn't be able to do that if I were married to David. He has this thing where he always wants to shield me from everything."

"What's wrong with that?" asked Connie. "You'd be much worse off if you got stuck with a man who didn't give a damn what happened to you."

Allison sighed. "I know it," she said. "But I can't live through David's experience, either." She stopped and grinned at her mother. "You know what's the matter with me?" she asked. "I want everything. Every experience,

every sight and smell and taste and feeling. But I don't want anything to hurt me." She stood up and went to the window. "So you see how impossible it is," she said. "Nobody can have both, can they?"

Connie refilled the cups. She thought, Allison has grown a lot in the past year, but in many ways she's still a romantic little girl. "I can see why you want to wait," she said. "But I do wish that David were coming for the holiday."

"He's working on a book," said Allison. "And when David is working, all the furies of Hell couldn't tear him away from his typewriter. Perhaps he'll be up for Christmas. Stevie is coming for Thanksgiving, though. And if it's all right with you, Mother, I'd like to ask my publisher to come too," she added hurriedly.

Constance turned and looked at Allison. "You mean Lewis Jackman?"

"Yes," said Allison. "I'd like him to see Peyton Place."

"Well, of course, dear. You know you can invite anyone you like."

Constance paused to light a cigarette and glanced at Allison over the wavering flame of the match. "He's married, isn't he?"

"Lewis Jackman? Yes, he is. And he's in his forties, too."

"Well," Constance said, "that doesn't matter. Some men are younger at that age than others are when they're twenty."

Allison laughed. "Where did you learn all that, Mother?"

Constance said, "Darling, there are some things you learn just by living and keeping your eyes open. You don't have to personally experience all sorts of men to know that there are some who are born old and there are others who are still young when they're sixty."

"Well," Allison said, "all this has got nothing to do with Lewis Jackman. He's just my publisher and a very charming man. It doesn't matter to me whether he's eight married, or unmarried."

Constance said, "What about his wife? Will she be coming, too?"

"I don't think so," Allison said, looking down into her cup. "From what I hear, she's quite sick. She doesn't see anyone but her psychiatrist."

"Oh, I see," Constance said. "Too bad."

Surreptitiously she watched Allison's face. She wondered why talking about Lewis Jackman had made her so nervous, and why Allison did not look at her when she spoke of Jackman's wife. There were a hundred questions Constance wanted to ask her daughter, and it was only with a conscious effort that she kept her mouth shut. You must not pry, she warned herself. When Allison is ready to tell you about this, she will tell you.

Constance was certain something was going on. A young girl's infatuation with an older man, she thought, can sometimes be a very strong thing. She wondered if the fact that Allison had never known her own father might not have something to do with it. Perhaps Lewis Jackman was providing Allison with the father image she had always lacked.

Mike returned. He burst into the kitchen carrying two large bags of groceries. Then he sat down at the table with them, held up the empty cup and said to Constance, "Reward me. I have been a good boy."

Constance filled his cup. "There," she said. "Is that reward enough for you?"

"Ask me later," Mike told her in a stage whisper.

Allison laughed. "Sometimes I feel like you two are my children," she said.

She asked Mike how he was enjoying his teaching job in White River.

He made a face. "If my wife could support me in the manner to which I've grown accustomed, I'd give up that job with just one minute's notice."

Connie put her arm around his shoulders. "You should have swallowed your pride and your honour when the school board here told you they were sorry and wanted you back," she said.

"What's this?" Allison cried.

"It happened just after you left," Constance explained. "Mike's being fired became such a scandal in educational circles that even Roberta got scared. Also, the new principal turned out to be an absolute dud."

"They came to me, Roberta and poor old Charlie, with their hats in their hands—and, let me tell you, Roberta looks better with it in her hands than on her head—and offered me my old job," Mike said.

"Mike told them he wouldn't take the job back until they agreed to a few demands he had to make."

"It'll do them good to stew in their own juice for a year," said Mike. "Besides, they'll need that long to make up their minds to give me everything I asked for."

"Everything like what?" asked Allison.

"Like tenure and a thousand dollar a year raise every year for the next five years," replied Mike.

"Charlie Partridge is all for it," said Connie. "But he can't convince Marion. Roberta is on the fence."

"We'll see," Mike said.

"Yes, but when?" asked Allison.

"In March," replied Mike. "When the new contracts come out."

"Thank God it'll be in March," said Allison. "In April the group from Hollywood will be here, and I don't imagine that they'll do anything to improve our public relations with Peyton Place."

"They're really coming then?" asked Connie.

"Yes," replied Allison. "God help us all."

"I heard that it was quite a session when their advance guard met with the locals," said Mike. "Tishman's representative was a man named Blanding . . ." Mike went on.

"Conrad Blanding," said Allison. "He's the director."

"Well, Blanding told old Tom Perkins that all the studio wanted to do was use the town for a few weeks, and in return they'd leave approximately a hundred thousand dollars of their money behind. But old Tom wasn't impressed."

"He wouldn't be," Connie said. "He's New England

through and through. What's good enough for his grandfather is good enough for his grandchildren. I wish some of these people would get over the idea that progress is sinful. I'm surprised Tom Perkins hasn't organized hatchet parties to smash up every TV set in Peyton Place."

"Stop interrupting with your seditious talk," Mike said. "If you're not careful, I'll have you run out of town on a rail." He turned to Allison and continued his account.

"Perkins told Blanding that Peyton Place had managed to get along very well without outside money for a good many years and that as far as he was concerned we could all stagger along for another century or two without any help from Hollywood."

"I warned Arthur Tishman," said Allison. "But he took one look at photographs of the castle and made up his mind. And when Arthur makes up his mind, *nothing* can shake it."

"Well, it'll give the town something new to talk about," Mike said. "Maybe they'll give Marion Partridge a job as an extra. . . ."

"She could play one of the witches," Connie said. "She wouldn't even need make-up."

"—and she'll forget about me and my job," Mike finished, a look of exaggerated patience on his face while he waited through Constance's interruption.

"Nitwit," she said. "You can help me with dinner while Allison goes up and unpacks. And there's time for a nap, darling, if you're feeling tired," she said to Allison.

"Perhaps I will lie down for an hour," Allison said, and went up to her room.

Her room was the same, exactly as she had remembered it, exactly as she had imagined it during those lonely nights in the expensive hotels in New York and California. It was a simple room, still full of reminders of her girlhood.

Her luggage, which Mike had stacked neatly at the foot of her bed, seemed a violation of the simple spirit of the room. The luggage was new, it was full of new things. It had nothing to do with the Allison MacKenzie whose room this was, with the Allison MacKenzie who had gone to

novies with Selena, taken walks with Norman and dreamed childhood's peculiar dreams.

The luggage seemed to Allison a dreadful reminder of how much her life had changed. She lay down on her bed and thought, I live in two worlds now, I am a completely divided person. There is the world of Peyton Place, and I will never be so much at home anywhere else. And there is the outside world of New York and Hollywood in which I play a rôle, as surely as any actress does.

Except with Lewis. That is the one genuine aspect of the other world.

When her 'plane had landed at La Guardia, Lewis was waiting for her. All the way back to the city they held hands and just stared at each other, as if their eyes could never get enough of the sight of each other.

At the apartment hotel where she had reserved her suite of rooms, the manager awaited her in the lobby and welcomed her back. Bellboys ran to get her luggage from the car. And when they were finally alone, a small bottle of champagne cooling in a silver bucket, she then had to 'phone Constance.

It was only after this was done that Lewis finally took her in his arms. It was as if they waited till all the petty little details were out of the way, and they would not have to be interrupted by anyone or for anything, that they turned to each other.

"My God, darling!" Lewis said. "How I've missed you!"

"Oh, I know, I know," Allison said.

"I couldn't sleep nights for missing you. Talking to you on the 'phone, and you so many miles away, was a torture. And yet I had to 'phone you. It was better than nothing."

"We'll have a week together now, darling, and after Thanksgiving I'll be back for good and all. But I have to spend some time with Constance and Mike. And I want to be with them for a while, Lewis. I need it. These last few weeks have been exhausting."

Lewis opened the bottle of champagne. "We'll start building you up with this," he said. "It's full of vitamins, as you know."

She smiled at him and looked around the high-ceilinged, beautifully proportioned room. It had come to seem almost like her second home, not because of its grandeur but because of the hours she had shared here with Lewis. The terrace doors were closed against the cold; the chairs and table had been taken away from the terrace. It looked bleak and deserted.

She picked up an empty glass and Lewis filled it for her. They toasted each other wordlessly, with their eyes alone. Allison felt the cold liquid explode against the roof of her mouth and send bubbles of warmth coursing through her veins.

When Allison had finished her second glass she broke away from Lewis's arms, and, picking up the champagne bottle, went into the bedroom. Lewis undressed her and when she was standing naked before him he raised his glass to her beauty and drank. In bed together, they finished the bottle, their thighs touching under the blankets and Lewis's arm around her shoulders.

"Shall I order another bottle, darling?" Allison asked.

"Do you think we need it?"

Allison smiled. "I don't think we needed the first one. But it was very nice."

She dropped her empty glass on the rug as Lewis touched her breast and stroked the smooth soft flesh.

"Oh, Lewis, darling, darling," she whispered.

But he paid no attention to her urgency and caressed her with his hands and bit her ear lobes until she cried out. She felt she would suffocate and she threw off the blankets. Words of love came from her mouth in a fierce whisper. She closed her eyes and when he pushed her over she felt the whole world was turning with her. She put her arms around him and drew him to her.

There has never been anything like this, she thought, never, never, never. She rose upward on a curving wave until all thought was driven out of her and only love filled her, tirelessly, until she was replete with love and helpless in his arms and her face glistened with tears of joy.

ON THE day after Allison returned to Peyton Place, Peter Drake backed his car out of his garage and drove towards the Cross house to pick up Selena and Joey. Peter rolled up his window against the cold wind that stripped the last leaves from the tortured trees.

Elm Street was deserted. The only moving thing that Peter could see was a torn sheet of newspaper that blew against a kerbstone in front of the bank. Peter thought he had never seen a lonelier sight in his life.

Connie's house will be warm and cheerful and good smelling, thought Peter. Maybe Selena will be able to relax today.

He did not give voice, even silently, to his other hope.

Maybe today Selena will be over Tim Randlett for good. Maybe today she'll decide that she wants to marry me after all.

Peter was what Peyton Place described as a 'well-set-up' man. He was moderately tall, with good shoulders and square hands. His hair was dark brown and his eyes matched it almost exactly. As an attorney in Peyton Place, Peter was not quite as well set up as he looked. Into his office came the people whom Charles Partridge was too busy to see. The ones with rather insignificant problems and the ones with no money. The only way that Peter managed to make a living was by travelling to the surrounding towns and taking the cases of the people there; but he clung stubbornly to Peyton Place.

Peter has never meant it to happen that way. When he had undertaken the job of defending Selena Cross at her trial for the murder of Lucas, he had planned to make this his last case in northern New England. But when it was over, he had lingered. The job with a law firm in Connecti-

cut that had been waiting for him was soon filled by someone else, and when, a few weeks later, he was offered another job with a firm in Massachusetts, he turned it down.

I'm out of my mind, he told himself often and angrily during the years that followed.

But he was in love with Selena and believed that, in time, she would come to love him.

In the beginning, he had waited while she recovered from the dreadful experience of Lucas Cross. Then he had waited for her to forget the defection of Ted Carter. Now he was waiting for her to stop remembering Tim Randlett.

"I'm stuck," he had once confessed to Constance Rossi. "I love her and I always will and there's not a damned thing I can do about it. And don't think I haven't tried, because I have. I've *almost* taken jobs away from here. I've *almost* become involved with other girls. I've *almost* convinced myself that I could get over her. Almost. But I've never made it."

"Have you ever told any of this to Selena?" asked Connie.

"Many times," said Peter. "And every time she tells me that I'd be better off without her. That she's no good for me." He shrugged helplessly. "It never does any good," he said. "I still wait and hope."

Peter stopped his car in front of Selena's house and made his way up the walk to the front door.

"Come in, Counsellor!" cried Selena, flinging the door open for him. "Welcome!"

She was holding a glass in her hand, and Peter knew it was not her first drink of the day.

"Hail, the conquering hero comes, Joey," called Selena. "Fix him a drink. Well, don't just stand there, Peter. Come in."

Behind her back, Joey looked at Peter and hunched his shoulders as he poured liquor into a glass.

"Here, Joey," said Selena. "Freshen mine, will you? I have to finish dressing."

"You look wonderful, Selena," said Peter.

For a moment, she looked completely sober. "Don't lie, Peter," she said. "I look like a hag and I know it."

She turned and went quickly into her room and closed the door behind her.

"When did it start, Joey?" asked Peter.

Joey handed him a glass. "I guess she never really sobered up from last night," he said. "She didn't eat any supper. I found her sitting there, with the lights out and a glass in her hand."

It had started at the end of August, Peter remembered. And since then, Selena had not once gone to bed sober.

"Don't worry too much about it," Connie had told Peter. "Women have different ways of getting over unfortunate love affairs. Selena is hiding right now. Trying to pretend nothing is wrong. Give her a little time. She's a sensible girl. She'll snap out of it."

But the weeks went by and Selena did not snap out of it. She started drinking in the morning, to clear her head, she told Joey, and Peter had caught her drinking in the back room of the Thrifty Corner.

"For Christ's sake, Selena," he had said. "What do you suppose Connie would say about this?"

Selena whirled on him. "Mind your own damned business," she said. "If Connie Rossi has any objections to the way I run her store, let her tell me herself."

"You're acting like a fool," said Peter angrily.

"Perhaps that's because I am one and always have been," said Selena.

"Drinking never solved anybody's problems," said Peter.

"Maybe not," said Selena, "but it does bring a measure of forgetfulness."

In desperation, Peter had gone to Matthew Smith

"Believe me, Peter," said the doctor, "if I knew anything I'd tell you and ethics be damned. But I don't know a lot more than you do. A couple of tourists, Jim and Sam, found her lying on the side of the highway, and since there was the closest town they brought her here to the hospital. She had fainted on the road. Her face was as white as paper."

where she hit the gravel, and she was suffering from too much sun, but outside of that there wasn't anything the matter with her. The next day I tried to find out what the hell had happened, but she wouldn't say a word. That actor fellow, Randlett, came over to the hospital to see her, but when I told her he was waiting she just turned her face to the wall and told me she didn't want to see him. He didn't believe it at first, but he finally went away. Joey told me that he went to the house after I sent her home, but Selena called Buck McCracken and told him that there was a man ringing her doorbell and that the sheriff should get rid of him. Then I heard that the summer theatre was closing up. Right around Labour Day, that was, and I went up to Silver Lake to see this Randlett. He shut up like a clam when I started questioning him. Wouldn't tell me a thing. The next thing I knew, the whole kit and kaboodle of them had gone off to New York. And good riddance, I say. Selena was getting along fine before Randlett hove into view."

"She's drinking," Peter told him. "Too much. Every day and every night."

Matthew Swain sighed. "I'll talk to her," he promised. But it did no good.

"Doc, don't worry about me," Selena said. "Just go back to Chestnut Street and forget that you ever heard of me."

Matthew felt his stomach tighten. He remembered the night, a long time ago, when he had tried to interfere when Lucas had been drunk and beating his wife. A very young Selena had looked up at him.

"Go on home, Doc," she had said. "Go back to Chestnut Street. Nobody sent for you."

"Selena, I only want to help you," said Matthew.

Selena poured another drink. "Doc, there are some people who are born crippled, aren't there? I mean, with only one leg or one arm or no eyes?"

"Yes," said the doctor.

"Well, then," said Selena, "why is it unreasonable to sup-

those that other people are born with something wrong and twisted inside?"

"What do you mean?" asked Matthew.

Selena smiled. "I mean something evil, like a desire to commit murder, for instance."

"Selena, all that was a long, long time ago. You only did what you had to do to protect yourself. Anyone would have done the same. Forget all that. Put it behind you."

Selena squinted at the remaining liquor in her glass.

"Go home, Doc," she said wearily. "Go home. Nobody sent for you."

Matthew Swain stood up to leave, but he paused at her front door.

"That stuff never solved anything for anybody," he said.

Selena giggled. "That's what Peter always says," she said. "And I always agree with him. I only point out to him that, while it may not solve anything, it blunts the edges a little. Goodbye, Doc."

Selena came out of her room. "I'm ready," she said gaily. "Let's go. Will you get my coat, Joey, while I finish my drink?"

"Ever since Tim Randlett left town."

"Good God."

"Yes," said Connie. "Let's just hope that she gets over it soon."

"Has anyone tried talking to her?"

"We all have. It doesn't help."

"What does Peter say?"

"He's waiting for her to stop, the same as the rest of us. What else can he do?"

"Hey, you two!" said Selena from the kitchen doorway.

"What's all the whispering about?"

"You," said Allison and turned to her with a smile.

"We were wondering how much longer you're going to keep poor Peter hanging fire."

Selena sat down on a kitchen chair. "Let's have a drink, shall we? Just the three of us."

"Sure," said Connie. "Let me bring the coffee in for the men and I'll be right back. Allison, get some ice, will you, dear? There's a bottle of bourbon in the cabinet behind you."

"Yes," said Selena, when she had the fresh drink in her hand, "poor, poor Peter. He loves me, you know. You know that, Allison, don't you?"

"Yes, I do," said Allison. "He has for a long time."

Selena began to cry. "Poor Peter. Poor, poor Peter."

"Don't cry, darling," said Connie. "Everything's going to be all right."

"Nothing is all right," cried Selena, her voice rising. "Nothing is all right at all, and it's never going to be!"

"Sh-h," warned Connie. "You don't want the men to hear you."

Selena calmed down. "No," she said. "No, I don't want them to hear me."

Then she put her head down on her arms and sobbed as if her heart would break. Allison went to her at once and put her arm across Selena's bent shoulders. She and Connie looked at each other and both of them knew that there was nothing to be done.

Later that same evening, Joey went to meet some friends with whom he was going to the movies, and Peter Drake drove Selena home. The wind was stronger now; he felt it tugging at the car and tightened his grip on the wheel.

"Make me a fire, Peter," said Selena, when they went into her living-room. "A big, beautiful, bright fire to chase the dark out of all the corners." She dropped her coat carelessly over the back of a chair. "I'll make us a drink," she said.

Peter almost said, Don't you think you've had enough? But he stopped himself and began to build the fire.

"No, I haven't had enough," said Selena into the silence. "There isn't enough in the whole, wide world."

Now the fire was burning brightly and Peter sat down. He reached for the glass that Selena extended to him.

"I can't lick you," he told her, "so I might just as well join you."

"Don't you ever stop playing the heavy?" asked Selena. "Any time you don't feel like joining me you don't have to. Just put on your coat. You know where the door is."

"Don't try to pick a fight with me, Selena," said Peter. "I won't let you."

"Who wants to fight?" asked Selena. "I've had a bellyful of fights. Enough fights to last me a lifetime."

"Do you want to talk?" asked Peter.

Selena smiled humourlessly at him. "You remind me of someone I used to know," she said. "Always prying. Always poking his nose in where it wasn't wanted." She gulped thirstily at her drink. "Tell me about it, Selena," she mimicked. "What's troubling you, Selena? Tell me, Selena. You'll feel better for it." She refilled her glass. "I'm sick of talking," she said.

"I wasn't trying to pry," said Peter.

"Yes, you were!" she said angrily. "Everybody in the world is a goddamned prying busybody. Well, what do you want from me, Peter? Do you want to know if I slept with him? Yes, I did. Are you wondering if I loved him? Yes, I did." Her voice rose until she was almost screaming. "Are you wondering if I've forgotten him? No, I haven't."

Peter watched her, appalled, as the tears streamed down her face and her voice rose higher and higher.

"Are you wondering why I left him?" she cried. "Are you wondering what went sour, and why and how?"

In that moment, the front door blew open. Apparently, Peter had not closed it securely when they had come in, and now the wind took it and sent it smashing back against the wall with a crash.

Selena jumped to her feet, her drink spilling all over the front of her and the glass smashing at her feet.

In one motion, she had turned and her fingers had closed around the fire tongs on the hearth.

"Don't!" she screamed. "Don't come a step nearer! I'll kill you!"

Peter grabbed her from behind, and for a long moment Selena stared at the empty black square at the door, that door which on a night like this had once framed the dark bulk of Lucas Cross.

"There's nobody there, darling," said Peter. "Nobody." The tongs fell from Selena's nerveless fingers and she began to sob. Peter turned her to him and pressed her face against his shoulder.

"I tried to kill him," she cried. "He was just like Lucas and he came at me and I tried to kill him."

Peter held her very tightly against him while she sobbed.

"He wanted to tear my clothes off," she wept. "He said I wanted to be raped and he was just like Lucas and I picked up the fire tongs and wanted to kill him."

"It's all right, darling," soothed Peter. "Don't cry any more. It's all right."

"What's wrong with me, Peter?" Selena cried. "Why did it happen? What do I do that makes men like that?"

Peter kissed her soft hair. "It's not you, darling. You've just had bad luck, that's all. It's not you."

Selena's whole body trembled. "I drank and drank," she said, gasping for breath, "and it didn't do any good. I couldn't forget that I tried to kill him."

Peter gave her a gentle shake. "But you didn't, darling. It's over now. You didn't."

He led her gently to the sofa and held her cradled in his arms.

"Peter, I'm so scared. There's something wrong with me. I know there's something wrong with me," she sobbed.

"There's nothing wrong with you, darling," said Peter. He began to mop gently at her face with his handkerchief. "There's nothing wrong. Come on, now. Stop crying."

Huge, dry sobs shook her as she put her head against his shoulder.

"You react to violence with violence," said Peter. "Some people do, you know." He tipped her head up and looked down at her. "I'll have to remember that," he smiled, "whenever I get the mistaken idea that I can get rough around you."

"You're so good, Peter," she said, and a sigh went through her whole body as she relaxed against him. "I don't deserve anyone like you."

Peter smiled against her hair. "You deserve the best of everything," he said. He began to stroke her.

This is what I need, Selena thought, this is what I've always needed, Peter's gentle strength. It will protect me from all harm.

His hand continued to stroke her hair and back. It was as if his fingers were drawing out of her all the pain of the past and the agony of memory.

"When we get married," Peter whispered, "it will be the true beginning of our lives. You'll see, Selena—what's happened up till now has nothing to do with us. We were other people then. And it all took place in another world."

He had a profound understanding of Selena's need. He wanted to be able to shuck off the past as easily as a farmer rips the corn from the stalk. With Peter, she wanted to be newborn and washed clean of the taint of the past. His arms moved around him and held him tight. She put her head and he bent to kiss her forehead.

This will be the first time, Selena thought, this will be the first time.

She drew Peter down with her until they were lying side by side on the sofa; she moved and adjusted her body to the length of his. Hesitantly, his hand caressed her thigh, moved up until it gently touched her breast. Her lips parted, he kissed her; she moaned softly when he pushed up her sweater. She clasped her hands behind his head and held him.

"Oh, Selena, darling," he whispered, and she heard the breathlessness in his voice.

He began to undress her. Selena felt faint, felt as if the world were slipping away from her. She covered her face with her hands, and in the darkness under her hands the world held still.

"Oh," she said, "oh, I want you." And she raised her hands to him as if imploring him and drew him to her.

carded as foolhardy and dangerous. Roberta burned leaves and vacuumed her rugs and began to plan her strategy.

Jennifer would be back in Peyton Place for the Thanksgiving holidays. I've got to kill her, she thought, and I have to do it well enough so that no one ever suspects a thing.

Roberta Carter began to read murder mysteries, but she did not borrow these from the Peyton Place public library nor did she buy them at the local bookstore. She travelled eighty miles to a city to shop, and she bought paper-backed novels in a large drugstore where she was not known, and she read secretly, behind the locked door of her bathroom.

During the day, when Harmon was at work, she wrote down the plot of each novel and listed the clues that had finally landed each murderer in the nets of the police. In this way, she discarded murder by shooting, stabbing, strangling and poison; and since Jennifer was not the type to commit suicide, Roberta realized that her daughter-in-law's death would have to be made to look like an accident.

Although Jennifer drove a car, Roberta could never hope to tamper with an automobile to the extent of causing a fatal accident. Household mishaps were out, too, for whenever Jennifer visited in Peyton Place or Roberta went to Cambridge Harmon was always around, or Ted, or both of them. No. It had to be something that happened when Roberta was not with Jennifer and when Ted, also, was away from his wife so that no breath of suspicion fell on him.

Roberta closed the cover of still another murder mystery and sighed deeply. It wasn't going to be easy, but then, she hadn't expected that it would be. In the meantime, there was plenty to do. She must begin to fabricate a fiction of her relationship with Jennifer. Peyton Place must be impressed with Roberta's magnanimity. When it was over and Jennifer was dead, people had to be able to say, "What a pity. And that this should happen to Roberta Carter, of all people. Why, she is the soul of goodness and she and Jennifer were so close."

Roberta was, as she had always been, clever about sounding out people and when, within two weeks after the

reopening of school in September, she discovered that the town was more than displeased with the man who now acted as headmaster of the Peyton Place school, she began to agitate for the return of Mike Rossi to his rightful position. Behind the back of her best friend, Marion Partridge, she let Charles know that when the school board considered the contracts for the next year she, Roberta, would be behind Charles one thousand per cent in his campaign to rehire Mike.

"The whole thing has given this town a terrible black eye," she confided in Charles. "I mean, firing Mike just because of Allison's book. I was never really for it in the first place."

And Charles Partridge, the town pacifist, forgot that Roberta had been one of Mike's sworn enemies and accepted her new attitude gratefully.

"It'll take a while for people to get over the way we acted about Mike," said Roberta. "We've managed to make ourselves a laughing-stock in educational circles. But it's nothing that can't be patched up."

"And the sooner the better," amended Charles Partridge.

Roberta began to make frequent visits to the Thrifty Corner where she not only made purchases, but became very friendly with Connie and Selena.

"I'm so very glad for you and Peter," said Roberta to Selena. "He's certainly a lucky man."

"I wonder what ails her," said Selena when Roberta had gone. "I've never know her to be so sweet. It's almost sickening."

But Connie, the incurable optimist, said, "Perhaps she's mellowing. After all, Roberta's no teenager any more. She's getting on."

"I still don't believe that the leopard changes its spots," said Selena.

But, as the weeks went by, even Selena had to admit that Roberta Carter had changed. In October, Mike Rossi was offered, and accepted, on terms he had made clear to the school board, his old job as principal of the Peyton Place

school. The whole town, with a few die-hard exceptions, had been overwhelmingly on Mike's side of the fence. One of the exceptions was Marion Partridge, and in the interests of, as she put it, doing the right thing, Roberta Carter broke with her lifelong friend.

To various women in town Roberta said, "I'm sorry that Marion feels as she does, but I wanted to do what was best for the school."

The women carried the word into their homes and practically everyone agreed that Roberta Carter was the soul of unselfishness. They sympathized with Roberta, too, for Roberta let it be known that what she wanted more than anything was a grandchild, but Jennifer, so far, had not conceived.

"It's a shame," said the women of Peyton Place. "It isn't as if Ted and Jennifer had to worry about money or anything. Heaven knows Roberta and Harmon are more than generous."

Then Roberta let it be known that her son, Ted, wanted to come back to Peyton Place to practise law when he graduated from Harvard, and if there had been any doubt at all in the minds of the town, it was now assuaged. Peyton Place loved a local boy who went away and obtained the best education money could buy and then returned home to put what he had learned to use.

"Ted always had a good head on his shoulders," said the town. "A good boy, Ted. And a smart one."

"Old Charlie Partridge ain't gonna last forever. We'll need somebody like young Carter to take over when Charlie goes."

Roberta counted heavily on the quality in her son that kept him from hurting anyone if he could possibly refrain from doing so. When anyone in Peyton Place mentioned Ted's eventual local practice, rather than denying flatly that he had no intention whatsoever of coming home to set up an office, Ted merely smiled and said modestly, "I've got to get through school first, and that's not going to be easy for a dull fellow like me."

By the end of summer, Roberta knew that the time had come to act. Jennifer's parents had begun to talk of a trip to Europe for 'the children', and Ted was obviously enthused at the prospect.

I've got to find a way, Roberta thought, with the beginning of panic.

Day after day she stayed in her house with her murder mysteries and her notebook. October was nearly over before she finally decided on a course of action, and then she spent hours writing in her notebook. She worked out all the drawbacks to her plan, the risks, the clues she must not leave behind; and she planned a meticulous timetable of the day when it would happen. At last, she locked her notebook away in her desk and breathed a sigh of relief.

Now it was over except for the actual act. She had found a way to get rid of Jennifer that was simple, safe and fool-proof. She sat at the desk for a moment, her hands clenched into tight, avenging fists, her mouth compressed into a thin determined line. In her head, Jennifer's terrible words still echoed, the horrible things she had told Ted on their last night in Peyton Place.

She had been listening to them through the air vent, lying in her own sweat on the cot in the storage room. She had heard them make love, had heard Jennifer torture Ted and tease him into doing all sorts of perverse and evil things. She had writhed in anguish for poor Ted.

Then she had heard Jennifer's salacious whisper.

Ted said, "You're insatiable, darling."

"More," Jennifer said. "I want more. Oh, goddamn men, anyway!"

Ted laughed. "We're badly designed," he said. "You'll have to wait for next year's models."

Roberta heard the bed creak as Jennifer sat up and rested her back against the headboard.

"I think I'll get myself a seventeen-year-old boy," Jennifer said.

Ted laughed. To him, talk like this was part of Jennifer's smartness and sophistication. In Ted's eyes, being born to

mind because it would hurt your male pride, whatever that is. But you wouldn't do anything about it, would you, Ted? Not you. As long as you can get your name on the door, as long as you can have success, you'll put up with anything. And I mean *anything*, Ted."

"Go to sleep, Jennifer. You're talking like a child," Ted said.

They were silent then. After a while, they fell asleep. Everyone in Peyton Place was asleep except Roberta Carter. She lay on the cot with her hands pressed tight against her mouth, her eyes staring at the dark ceiling.

I must kill her, she thought. I must kill her. She wasn't just talking. She's going to do these things. Maybe she's already started doing them. I must kill her.

THE MEN of Chestnut Street gathered at the home of Seth Buswell for their usual Friday night poker game. Seth put a bottle of liquor on the sideboard and filled four glasses with ice while Leslie Harrington began to shuffle the cards for the first hand.

"Another winter is here," said Matthew Swain as he sat down.

"Yep," said Seth. "Ephraim Tuttle's got his stove set up and his bolts of material put away."

"Where did the year go?" said Charles Partridge. "Seems as though it was only a few weeks ago that we were sitting here talking about Allison MacKenzie's book, and that was last April."

"That's because we're getting old," said Matthew. "Time goes by quick as a wink for us nowadays. But I can remember how it used to drag by when I was a youngster."

"You ain't got that good a memory to remember that far back, Matt," said Leslie Harrington.

"Neither have you, Grandpa," said Matt. "Although I must say, you've looked better this past year than I've ever seen you look."

"I've got to keep healthy to keep up with that grandson of mine," said Leslie. "He's a holy terror."

"How's Betty?" asked Seth.

"Fine," said Leslie. "I think she's finally made up her mind to stay right here in Peyton Place."

"Good," said Matthew and Seth simultaneously.

Charles Partridge did not say anything. Except for Leslie himself, Charles was the only man in town who knew what torture Leslie had suffered at the hands of Betty Anderson.

"Five pretty little black spades," said Seth Buswell gleefully and raked up the coins from the centre of the table.

Spades, thought Charles Partridge. That's what Betty Anderson paid Leslie back in. In spades.

Rodney Harrington, Junior, had been no problem, Charles remembered. The boy had taken to his grandfather as if he had known him all his life, and Leslie, of course, was overwhelmed with love. Little Roddy was the image of his father, and the lines of age and worry erased themselves from Leslie's face every time he looked at his grandson. His friends were not the only ones in Peyton Place to notice how much better Leslie looked. Betty Anderson noticed it, too, and she smiled a tight little smile at the man who had never been her father-in-law. She had been in Peyton Place for two weeks, just long enough for Leslie to begin to hope that she would stay forever, when he started packing to leave.

"I have a job to get back to," she told Leslie when he protested.

"You don't have to work," said Leslie. "There's more than enough money right here."

Betty turned on him. "Listen, Leslie, I got along fine without your money when I was pregnant, when Roddy was born and ever since. We don't need you."

Leslie humbled himself. "I know," he said. "I need you."

"That's just too bad," said Betty. "You should have needed us when you threw me out of your office with a lousy two hundred and fifty bucks and a load in my belly."

"Betty," pleaded Leslie. "I'll make it up to you. I swear I will."

"We don't need you," said Betty and went on with her packing.

In the end, she promised that she would stay another week and Leslie breathed again. But at the end of the week, she started packing again.

"For Christ's sake, Charlie," said Leslie in desperation. "Do something."

"What do you want me to do?" asked Charles Partridge. "You have no legal claim on that child."

"Goddamn it, he's my grandson!"

"Betty and Rodney were never married," said Charles. "And you can't prove that Betty's been an unfit mother. There's nothing you can do except hope that she'll change her mind and stay on voluntarily."

"Well, talk to her, then," demanded Leslie. "Make her see that it's best for the child if he stays there. I don't give a damn what she does as long as she leaves Roddy with me."

"She'll never leave him," said Charles. "If you want the child, you'd better make up your mind to want the mother, too. But I'll talk to her."

"What's in it for me?" asked Betty Anderson when Charles went to see her.

"You could be very comfortable here," said Charles. "You could live in this house and you wouldn't have to work and you and Roddy could be well taken care of."

"I can take care of myself," said Betty. "I always have. And of Roddy, too. I don't mind working for a living. And as far as this house goes, it gives me the creeps. It's like a goddamned museum."

"I'm sure that Leslie would be willing to let you do the house over," said Charles, worried lest he bite off more than he could chew. "I can't see what objection he'd have to that."

"I don't want to do Leslie's house over," said Betty. "I want a house of my own."

Charles's jaw sagged. "But Leslie wants you to live in the house with him. You and little Roddy."

Betty shrugged. "In the words of little Roddy's father, that's tough titty," she said.

"Will you stay until Christmas?" asked Charles.

"Nope."

"Until the end of the month?"

"Nope."

Charles went to Leslie and told him what Betty wanted if she were to remain in Peyton Place.

"A house!" roared Leslie. "What the hell's the matter with my house? It's big enough for an army!"

Charles spread his hands in a gesture of defeat. "I can't help that, Leslie. That's what she wants."

"She can go right straight to hell!" yelled Leslie.

But the next day, Betty began to pack again, and Leslie ran to Charles.

"Get her a house," he said wearily. "Any one she wants."

So Betty Anderson became the owner of a cottage at the end of Laurel Street.

"It'll be a nice place to spend my vacations," she told Charles.

"What do you mean, vacations?" asked Charles. "Don't you plan to live here?"

"On what?" asked Betty. "Does Leslie think I'm as rich as he is and can afford to sit on my backside all day long without working?"

"Leslie is perfectly willing to provide for the boy," Charles objected. "You could find work here to take care of your own needs."

"Where?" jeered Betty. "In the Mills? Like my old man? No thanks."

"But we thought——" began Charles.

"I don't give a damn what you thought," said Betty angrily. "I'm not going to take a two-bit job in the Mills working for Leslie Harrington. If I have to work to support myself, I can do that a lot better in New York. And that's where I'm going just as soon as I can get packed."

In the end, Leslie Harrington settled a sum of twenty-five thousand dollars on Betty Anderson and deposited another ten thousand in an account for his grandson. In addition, he agreed to give Betty a household allowance of one hundred dollars a week and buy her a new car every year.

"In writing," said Betty Anderson.

So Charles Partridge drew up the papers and Leslie Harrington signed them.

"One more thing," said Betty before she signed. "There's a friend of mine in New York who used to look after Roddy for me. I want her to come up here to live with me and help

with the house and with Roddy. Leslie'd have to pay her fifty a week."

So Agnes Carlisle came to live in Peyton Place with Betty Anderson, and Leslie Harrington agreed to pay her wages. In return for what he gave, Leslie was to be allowed unlimited visiting privileges and the right to keep his grandson with him for a full day, one day a week. In the event of Betty's marriage, she was to keep all moneys settled on her and Roddy, but her weekly allowance was to stop and Leslie was to be allowed the same privileges.

Betty Anderson leaned back comfortably in her new living-room and Agnes brought her a drink. The two women took their shoes off and sipped their martinis.

"Now I've got it made," said Betty. "Who wants to get married?"

"Didn't I tell you?" asked Agnes smugly. "I told you to get in touch with him, didn't I?"

"Yes, you did," agreed Betty. "And you never made a wiser suggestion in your life."

"For Christ's sake, Charlie," said Leslie Harrington crossly, "are you playing cards or not? We've been waiting for you to tell us whether you can open or not."

Charles Partridge looked at his cards. "I pass," he said.

"One card," said Leslie to Seth, who was dealing.

Old Leslie, trying to fill an inside straight, thought Charles. He'll probably hit, too. He usually gets what he wants. Even if there's a price on it.

At eleven o'clock, Leslie Harrington and Charles Partridge said goodnight to Matthew Swain and Seth Buswell.

"Let's walk a little," said Leslie when the two men were outside.

"Where to?" asked Charles. "It's late and I'm tired."

"I just want to walk past Betty's house," said Leslie. "I like to make sure everything's all right before I go to sleep at night."

"Do you go down there every night?" asked Charles.

Leslie nodded. "You never can tell," he said. "I might

catch that little bitch in a compromising situation some day."

"Leslie!" cried Charles in horror.

"Oh, cut it out," said Leslie. "You've known me too many years to be shocked at anything I say. Come on."

The two men walked slowly down Chestnut Street and turned into Laurel.

Betty Anderson's house was dark and still. Leslie stopped and looked at it, stared at it as if his eyes could see right through the walls—and right into the bitter, unforgiving heart of Betty Anderson, his grandson's mother. It was not only little Roddy's love that made Leslie appear younger these days; it was also the smell of battle. He was locked with Betty in a clash of wills. Nothing made him feel younger than a good fight.

He looked at the house and thought, You've won the first battle, Betty, but the war isn't over yet. Before I die, little Roddy will be living in the big house with me.

THE TRAIN pulled headlong into the long space that separated Lewis Jackman from Allison MacKenzie, and Lewis sat in the club car, impatient with his drink and with the way the hands on his watch moved as slowly as if they had been trapped in molasses. The wheels of the train, too, seemed to move forward in slow motion, and Lewis watched water condense on the outside of his glass and looked again at his watch.

Sitting next to him in the observation car was Stephanie. Allison had introduced them during the week she spent in New York after returning from Hollywood. They left Grand Central together and had been travelling together for eight hours. And that's about as many words as we've exchanged, Stephanie thought, eight. If I didn't know better, I'd have to conclude that Lewis Jackman was a man on his way to a heavy date.

"Hello, there!" said a feminine voice behind him, and, even before he turned, Lewis was resentful at anyone who would break into his thoughts.

"Hi," Stephanie said, disinterestedly.

"I remember you," the girl said. "You're Stephanie, Allison's friend."

"Yes."

The girl would not be put off with coolness. "I'm Jennifer Carter," she said. "My husband will be here in a minute. May we sit with you?"

Stephanie wanted very badly to say No, but instead, she said, "Of course." She introduced Jennifer to Lewis.

"Here's Ted now!" said Jennifer, and turned to her husband. "Darling, you remember Stephanie, don't you? Allison introduced her to us last Christmas."

"Sure," said Ted and extended his hand. "How are you?"

"Are you going up to Peyton Place to visit Allison, too, Mr Jackman?" asked Jennifer.

"Yes, I am," replied Lewis.

The girl's eyes were bright with a shrewdness that reminded Lewis of a snake, and although she was very beautiful there was something about her that was too finely drawn. Her cheekbones were too prominent and her chin had an aggressive tilt to it and her eyes darted everywhere so that they not only seemed to miss nothing but to probe beneath the surface of everything they saw.

"Allison must be a very important writer to drag a busy publisher like you so far away from civilization," said Jennifer, and her eyes fastened on his with a demand for an answer.

"She is," said Lewis. And the simple, unemphatic way in which he said it gave his words a great deal of authority.

Jennifer laughed. "It's so hard to think of little Allison MacKenzie of Peyton Place as an important writer, as someone to be taken seriously."

"Jennifer!" said Ted. "Don't say things like that."

"Don't be ridiculous, darling," said Jennifer. "I can't help it if that's what I thought, can I?"

Ted looked away uncomfortably. "Let's order," he said.

"Good idea," replied Jennifer. "I want a Scotch and water, please." She turned again to Lewis. "How long have you had this high opinion of Allison?" she asked, with the same persistence that had characterized her previous questions.

Lewis wanted to stand up and tell her that it was none of her business, but he didn't.

"A long time," he said, and his voice did not encourage further interrogation.

"Since before she got famous and began to make pots of money?" asked Jennifer.

"Yes," said Lewis. "Even before that." He looked at Stephanie and stood up. "I think we ought to be getting back to our seats, Stephanie." He nodded to Jennifer and Ted and said, "If you'll excuse us."

thousand dollars on deposit at the Citizens' National Bank and that they carried fifty thousand dollars' worth of insurance, and she knew that when Roberta wanted to be free in the evening she put a sleeping powder in Harmon's after dinner coffee. But best of all was a knowledge so gratifying that Jennifer was hard put to keep it to herself. Jennifer knew that whenever she went to Peyton Place with Ted, Roberta sneaked into the little room next to Ted's and listened to her son and daughter-in-law at night.

"It must be the air up here," Ted said to his wife. "Whenever we're in Peyton Place, you're as horny as a French whore who enjoys her work."

Jennifer almost laughed in his face. "You make me that way," she told him, and thought up new ways to arouse him and make him do unheard-of things to her. It excited her to distraction to know that Roberta was listening to every word and sound.

"I love you," she said. "All you have to do is look at me, and I begin to think of us like this."

It would have been a delicious secret to share, thought Jennifer. But Ted would never understand. He'd turn cold and refuse to touch her in his mother's house.

So she had to be content with watching Roberta's face the next morning.

"What's the matter, Mother?" asked Jennifer with a sly, little smile. "Didn't you sleep well?"

"As a matter of fact, I didn't," replied Roberta. "I guess I shouldn't have had that second cup of coffee."

"Well, I slept like a baby," said Harmon.

I'll bet you you did, thought Jennifer, thinking of the sleeping powders that Roberta kept locked in her dressing table.

Roberta kept her secrets locked up, but she wasn't very smart about it. She kept a ring with the keys to everything in the house under her pillow. It hadn't taken Jennifer long to find her hiding places.

As the train hurried towards Peyton Place, Jennifer smiled into her drink and wondered what was new at her in-

laws. She hadn't been to the Carters' since August, and there was bound to be a whole new crop of secrets by now.

Jennifer began to complain of a headache right after the train pulled out of Concord, and by the time she and Ted reached the Carter house in Peyton Place she had convinced her husband that all she wanted was to go to bed with some aspirin and a cup of hot tea.

"What a shame," said Roberta sympathetically. "And we were all going to the church supper tonight."

"I won't hear of the rest of you missing it," said Jennifer. "The three of you run along."

"Of course not," said Ted. "I don't want to leave you when you aren't feeling well."

"Don't be silly," replied Jennifer. "And please don't be stubborn, darling. If you don't go along with Mother and Dad, I'll feel like a heel and I'll have to force myself to join you. Please don't make me do that."

At last Ted capitulated and he, Roberta and Harmon left. Jennifer waited until she could no longer hear the sound of the car, then she got quietly out of bed and went to Roberta's room. She picked through Harmon's drawers without discovering anything new and when Roberta's dressing table yielded nothing but a new supply of sleeping powders, Jennifer was petulantly annoyed. Her fingers groped under Roberta's pillow and she straightened up in shocked surprise. The key ring was not there.

Jennifer's annoyance fled on the wings of excitement, and she began to search the room. Jennifer was very good at discovering hiding places, and for that reason she discarded the more obvious nooks and crannies that Roberta might have selected. Her fingers moved expertly through the pockets of all the garments in Roberta's closet, but with no success. She examined the bathroom minutely and when she had finished there she stood for a moment in the upstairs hall, concentrating with all her mind on what Roberta must have been thinking when she hid her keys.

In another moment, Jennifer went directly to the linen closet off the bathroom. Her fingers closed around a box of

soap flakes which Roberta kept for washing stockings and nylon underwear, and in another moment her probing hand touched the key ring. She lifted it carefully out of the box of soap flakes, cupping her hand under it so that she would leave no telltale trail of soap on the shelf, and she laughed out loud.

She unlocked the cedar chest in the front hall, but there was nothing there but winter blankets, a bottle of brandy and sixty-eight dollars in two-dollar bills. Jennifer left everything as she had found it and slammed down the cover of the chest. So her mother-in-law nipped at imported brandy on the sly and saved two-dollar bills. How dull, thought Jennifer in disappointment.

She went downstairs and unlocked the desk in the living-room. There was the usual collection of bills and cancelled cheques and unanswered letters. Jennifer examined everything without interest and glanced at her watch. The family would be back in less than half an hour. She unlocked the bottom drawer of the desk, expecting to be disappointed again, but she felt her interest quicken as her eyes fell on a loose-leaf notebook that hadn't been there on her last visit.

She picked it up and began to leaf through it, and her face paled as she read. Roberta had mapped out a plan for murder. A plan so simple and stupid that it might just work for those very reasons. Jennifer's heart pumped hard and fast as she read, and it was not until she heard a car stop outside that she raised her head. They were back.

In a flash, Jennifer locked the desk and ran upstairs. She buried the key ring deep in the box of soap flakes and ran to her room. Before she got back into bed, she looked out of the window and was just in time to see Roberta coming up the walk. You sly old bitch, she thought. You jealous old bitch. What a surprise you have in store for you!

Lying in bed, listening to Ted's footsteps coming up the stairs, Jennifer thought, This is going to be a memorable Thanksgiving Day.

Roberta had scheduled her murder for tomorrow.

ALLISON, MIKE and Constance sat up late with their guests on the night before Thanksgiving Day. Stephanie lay sprawled on the rug in front of the fireplace, Lewis sat in the armchair. Allison could tell that Mike liked Lewis very much. They had all begun the evening by talking about politics and literature, but now the night was coming to an end with gossip about Jennifer.

Stephanie described her behaviour on the train, and added, "I know the type. New York is full of them. Glazy, teasing little bitches, all golden promise on the outside and empty as a tin cup on the inside."

Lewis smiled, amused by Stephanie's colourful language. He said, "I've known a few Jennifers. And they've all run pretty much to type. They have the feeling that they can say anything or do anything, and Daddy's money will always be there to protect them. I hope you ladies won't jump on me, but I must say that no man I've ever met—and in my business I've met some pretty egocentric ones—has ever been as arrogant as these women are."

"Why is that?" Mike asked, like the good teacher he was.

"I think there's a very simple explanation," Lewis said.

"Men are always a bit worried that if they are too arrogant, someone will haul off and punch them in the nose. But women don't have that worry."

"You can say anything you like about Jennifer Carter," Constance said. "I won't jump on you. She's a queer one. I've never seen a girl so drawn and tense. And, at the same time, there's a nerveless quality about her. I have the feeling she could do the most monstrous thing, and not turn a hair."

Mike stood up. "If I refill everybody's glass, will you all promise to change the subject? I don't think Jennifer Carter is the best choice for an end of the night conversation. I

think I'd have pleasanter dreams if we told stories about vampire bats."

"I promise," Stephanie said, and held up her glass.

Not long after that they all went upstairs to their rooms. Allison shared her room with Stephanie, and Lewis slept in the guest room next to it. It tormented her, lying in bed with the knowledge that Lewis was just the other side of the thin wall.

As if reading her thoughts, Stephanie murmured, "Your friend Lewis is a beautiful man." She sighed. "I've come to the conclusion that all beautiful men are married."

"You'll find someone some day who is both beautiful and unmarried," Allison told her.

"I suppose," Stephanie said. "But meanwhile, back at the ranch, things are very lonely. I'm a girl who's good and tired of the single state, Allison. If I didn't have an exaggerated sense of my own worth, I'd accept the first producer who asked for my hand. Not that it's my hand they ask for."

Allison laughed. "You needn't worry. Eventually you're going to meet a man who sees right through you, right through your hard beautiful shell to the soft warm heart beneath. And that will be the end of him and the end of you."

"That's the first and probably the last time I'll ever feel complimented at being called a fraud," Stephanie laughed.

"Oh, I didn't mean that you're a fraud, and you know it. But you've built up defences, we all have. God knows, after my experience since the book's been published, I wouldn't dream of accusing you of being fraudulent. It would be a case of the pot calling the kettle black."

"Why do you say that, Allison?" Stephanie raised herself up on her elbow and looked at her.

Allison replied, "Lewis says nearly all writers feel this way. They feel like confidence men who have pulled off a fast one on the public. When your novel is successful, when a million people are reading it, when everyone is talking about it, you can't believe that all this is the result of your

talent. So you begin to think you've tricked them all and that you're a walking fraud."

"Do you still feel that way?"

"I don't know, Stevie. I really don't know. With one or two important exceptions, I feel my whole life is unreal and fraudulent now. I need to get back to work, to start writing my new book."

"Why don't you? This is the most perfect place for work."

"It's not easy. Sometimes I think it's because life is too exciting. I don't want to seal myself up and cut myself off from it. I have the feeling I'll miss something, something important."

She turned to Stephanie. "I've developed such a large appetite for life, Stevie. Success makes living so delicious that you don't want to miss a moment of it. I guess that's why the Hollywood people are so frightened of being alone. Even for an hour. I guess they figure that they've given so much for success that it would be a sin not to enjoy every minute of it to the full."

"Do you know what you want yet, Allison?"

"Yes," Allison said. "Everything."

Stephanie was silent then, and after a little while Allison could hear her regular breathing and knew she was asleep. She thought of Lewis, so near and so unreachable. She wondered if she dared sneak into his room. I can't, she answered herself, not in Constance's house. Finally, she fell asleep, exhausted by her thoughts.

It seemed only minutes later that she opened her eyes to the brightness of day and heard, remotely, as if from miles away, the sounds of Constance in the kitchen preparing the Thanksgiving dinner. She dressed quickly and hurried down to help her mother.

Mike was at the kitchen table with Constance; they were drinking coffee and talking in soft voices. Allison thought she heard Lewis's name mentioned.

Constance saw Allison standing at the door and said, "What are you doing up so early?"

"I wanted to help you with the dinner," Allison said.

Mike said, "We have the perfect job for you. It calls for intelligence and requires that the applicant be a person of responsibility."

"I don't think she's old enough for it yet," Constance said, playing along with Mike.

"I think we ought to give her a chance," Mike said.

He said to Allison, "Have you got grit and determination? Do you want to make something of yourself? If not, do not apply for this job."

Allison smiled at them. "You crazy fools," she said. "All right. I've got grit and determination. I want to get ahead. Now, what's the job?"

Mike pointed to the stove. "You see that little window in the oven?"

Allison nodded.

"Your job," Mike said, "is to draw a chair over to the oven, sit down on that chair and watch the turkey through the little window. We wouldn't want it to get away, would we?"

"I think the job is too big for her," said Connie. "After all, she's had very little experience as a turkey-watcher."

"I could rise to the challenge," Allison told them, speaking with mock fervour. "Please. This job could be the making of me."

"It's a lifetime career," Mike said. "Don't rush your decision. Here." He pulled out a chair. "Sit down, have a cup of coffee and think it over."

"We'll keep the job open while you're making up your mind," Constance said.

"Fools," Allison told them, shaking with laughter.

"Slacker," Mike said. "Coming down when the work's all done and offering your services."

"Why didn't you wake me?" Allison said.

"Because," said Constance, "we are the kind of parents who like to make sacrifices for our children and then tell them about it."

"Yes, we get our kicks that way," said Mike.

Allison got up and kissed them both.

"What was that for?" asked Mike.

"That," said Allison, "was for *not* being that kind of parent."

Thanksgiving Day at the MacKenzie house began with laughter and continued with laughter, through dinner and after it. Allison had never seen Lewis so happy, his face suffused with the joy of living and the happiness of being with people whom he liked. He sat next to Allison at dinner and, in the midst of laughter, squeezed her hand under the table. It was quick and almost painfully hard, and it expressed his joy and his gratitude to her for having brought him this.

He had once told Allison that until he had met her he had given up all hope of happiness. There were times that Thanksgiving Day when the look of love on his face was so naked that Allison thought Constance and everyone else was bound to notice it.

Dinner lasted two hours. It was late afternoon when they finished. Allison had wanted to take Lewis walking. She wanted to show him Road's End and the view of the town. She wanted to share all her secrets and memories with him.

"I wanted to take Lewis up to Road's End," she said to Mike and Constance, "but I'm afraid it's going to be ~~soon~~ soon." She turned to Lewis. "We won't have ~~time~~ time to be afraid."

"Nonsense," Mike said. "Take the car. You can be there in ten minutes and back again before ~~dark~~."

"Wonderful idea," said Allison. And ~~she~~ she hadn't thought of it. The car would ~~give~~ give them privacy, too. It would be the only chance ~~they~~ they had of being alone together before Lewis left ~~in the morning~~.

At the door, with the alpaca hood ~~over~~ over her head, she called back to Constance ~~and~~ and said, "Wait for me. Don't start on the ~~dinner~~ dinner."

"Slacker!" Mike called after her.

When Allison and Lewis had ~~left~~ left, the house was stuffed to the ears and ~~with~~ with the sound of the radio.

nap. He got up and walked to the stairs where he turned and smiled at Constance and said, "Now listen, darling. I want you to promise me that you won't start doing the dishes till I get up."

Constance wadded her napkin and threw it at him. From the top of the stairs, he called down, "Missed."

"He's a wonderful man," Stephanie said.

"Yes, he is," said Connie, "but don't tell him I said so."

Constance and Stephanie began to clear the table and carry the dishes into the kitchen. Steve was wearing a pair of tight, leopard-spotted slacks and she looked more like a contented well-fed cat than anything else. As they washed the dishes they began to gossip. Steve began it by asking about Selena.

"She's going to marry Peter Drake," Connie said.

"Really?" asked Steve, delighted.

"Yes," said Connie. "In June, after Joey graduates from high school."

"I'm so glad," said Steve. "She's such a doll and she's had such a helluva time."

"Worse than you think," said Connie. "Did you ever run into an actor in New York named Tim Randlett?"

"Him!" yelled Steve. "Jesus, yes. He's one of the biggest pains I've ever met."

"Well, he was up here this past summer and made a big play for Selena. For a while, she thought that she was in love with him."

"Oh, no," moaned Steve. "Listen, I'll tell you about that guy. He's the biggest phoney in the business."

"What do you mean?" asked Connie, remembering Mike's words about Tim Randlett.

"Oh, you know. The big star bit. He never got over the fact that because he could cry convincingly and made a pot of money in Hollywood he was a star. He still thinks he's the greatest. Honest, like he was Olivier or something. I worked with him on a TV programme once. Believe me, he's strictly from squaresville. Thinks he's irresistible because of his profile. You know what he does? He *acts*

AT ROAD'S END, Allison and Lewis sat in the front seat of the car and looked at Peyton Place, diminished and toylike below them. The houses seemed to have absorbed from the wintry sky its dead greyness. They look like tombstones, Allison thought, and shivered.

Lewis drew her closer to him.

"I don't know why," he said, "but it makes me rather sad to look at Peyton Place from here. It seems so forlorn."

"It's that time of year," Allison said. "I feel it too. It's the melancholy of autumn. Even though we know that every season is a new beginning, autumn always seems like an ending. So many things die."

Lewis took her face in his hands and looked at it for a long time; then, very gently, he kissed her eyelids and her lips.

"I love you, Lewis," Allison said.

"I hope it lasts forever, Allison."

"I know that our love will, Lewis. I wish that we could, too."

He laughed. "Autumn doesn't just make your melancholy, Allison. It makes you downright morbid."

"I know. I'm sure that once I get back to work it will be all right again. When I'm working, I forget what day it is, what season it is, what year."

"I hope you won't forget me," Lewis said.

"Not even if I tried, darling," Allison said. She pushed open his overcoat and pressed her body against his.

"Necking in a car," she said. "I feel like a schoolgirl. Not that I ever did this when I *was* a schoolgirl."

She looked around her at the bleakness of Road's End's landscape while Lewis's hands caressed her body. "I don't think I ever had even a crush on a boy," she said, thinking aloud more than talking. "My daydreams kept me so

Lewis's arms. Night had fallen and a sparse winter moon gave a watery light. The shadows of the trees were black on the hillside and black on the road.

"My God," Allison said, her voice low and unbelieving. "I thought we had had everything."

Lewis smiled and said nothing.

"I didn't think it could ever be better than what we already had," Allison said. She put her face to Lewis's chest and felt his heart beating against her lips. "Will it keep on like this, Lewis?" she asked, in a small, frightened voice. "Getting better and better, I mean. Will it? I hope it doesn't. I'm afraid I'd die if anything like this happened too often."

Lewis stroked her hair. Smiling, he said, "I don't think there's any cause for alarm, darling. Human beings are so oddly constructed that they get used to pleasure just as quickly as they get used to misery."

"I'm glad I found you, Lewis." She tightened her arms around him. "You'll always take care of me, won't you?"

"Always," Lewis promised.

"And in a few weeks I'll be back in New York, darling," Allison said, "and then I will be there always to take care of you. I'm going to take a year's lease on that gorgeous white and gold room, and I'm going to work all day and make love all night."

She sat up and lit a cigarette.

"Lewis," she said, "do you think that little manager will mind your coming to my apartment every night?"

Lewis laughed. "You are, at once and the same time, the most sophisticated and the most naïve woman I've ever met. The answer is: Yes, the manager will mind; and no, he won't say anything."

"Why won't he say anything?" Allison wanted to know.

"Because you are paying such a high rent that it's profitable for him not to mind. That's why," Lewis said. "As long as we're not noisy and don't disturb the other tenants, you'll never hear a word of complaint from him. The manager of that kind of hotel, the very expensive kind, is a

professional not-minder. One of the first lessons he had to learn at school was how to avert his eyes gracefully."

Allison laughed. "He also took a course in How to Walk Backwards. For the final examination, he had to walk backwards through a crowded room, bowing all the way, and never bumping into anything."

"And he did post-graduate work in finger-snapping," Lewis added. "When he snaps his fingers at those Hungarian ghosts, it goes off like a pistol shot."

"If it can't be heard across a hotel lobby, it just isn't good enough," Allison said. "Flabby-fingered managers don't grow up to be Conrad Hilton."

They laughed at themselves; everything seemed delightful. Not even the bleak New England landscape seemed depressing any more, and Peyton Place glowed like a jewel in the valley below. Allison imagined she could tell which house was hers, and imagined Mike and Constance and Steve around the fire. She wondered if they were talking about Lewis and her.

"What are you thinking about?" Lewis asked.

"I was just wondering if they are talking about us."

"If we don't get back soon," Lewis said, "they most certainly will be."

"Oh, I know," Allison said, groaning. "But I have to leave here. It's so private, darling. It's the last chance to be alone with you until after the New Year." She kissed him lightly. "But I see that now that you've had your way with me all you're interested in doing is getting back to civilization."

"That's the way we men are," Lewis said. "I plan to fire of you in a week or two and cast you aside like a worn-out rag."

Allison started the car. "You'll have to wait for a snowy night," she said. "It wouldn't be fair to turn me out in this weather."

They began the long, curving descent to Peyton Place. Lewis turned on the radio and was bent forward, looking for music, when Allison became aware that something was

wrong. She had tried to slow for the wide curve, but the brakes did not seem to respond; the car only swerved oddly. She made the curve and, taking her foot off the brake, found the car handled better. She sighed with relief.

"There," Lewis said. He sat back to enjoy the symphonic music he had found on a Boston station.

Allison touched the accelerator very softly with her toe; she wanted to increase the speed just a little for the upgrade. The car shot forward at a much greater speed than she had expected. What in the world's going on! she said to herself. Again she applied the brakes, and again the car swerved. She released the brakes and then, by the feel of the car, she knew what had gone wrong. The accelerator had stuck!

They were on the downgrade then and the car was going at sixty miles an hour. Allison tapped the accelerator with her toe; she gave it a sharp rap, thinking that would release it. But it remained stuck, only now it was in farther than it had been before and the speed of the car and her helplessness made her feel sick. She gripped the wheel tightly and watched with agonized eyes as the curve drew closer and closer.

As Lewis said, "Don't you think you'd better——" she slammed her foot on the brake, pushed it down to the floor boards and held it there. She smelled the brake lining beginning to burn.

"What's happening, Lewis?" she screamed, overcome with horror.

She saw his hand moving with terrible slowness towards the steering wheel. And then they went off the road and the car turned over and over.

She closed her eyes. She thought, Oh God, how many more times will it go over before it stops?

She sat in the kitchen with Mike and Constance; they were drinking coffee and laughing at one of Mike's jokes. I will never leave them, she thought, they are so good, so good.

Allison. Allison, Constance said. Allison. Allison. *Allison, darling!*

Allison opened her eyes. Gaunt trees swayed and bent above her, the moon caught in the branches like a bird in a trap. She pulled herself up and looked wildly about her.

The car, she said, the car. I must find Lewis.

She felt the pain stab in her chest; it made her weak and she fell to her knees.

Lewis, she called, Lewis. I'm coming, darling. I'm going to take care of you.

She raised her head and saw the car. She began to crawl towards it.

JENNIFER STARED at Roberta over the big Thanksgiving turkey.

That cold-blooded bitch, she thought savagely. Nobody had better ever say anything about my being nosy again. If I weren't, there's a damned good chance that, by tomorrow night at this time, I'd be dead.

Roberta poured coffee and smiled and talked about who had been at the Congregational Church.

"And did you have a good nap, dear?" she asked.

Jennifer, giving a headache for an excuse, had stayed behind to take a nap while the rest of the family went to the Thanksgiving services.

"I couldn't sleep," replied Jennifer. "So I decided to read."

She waited to see if Roberta would react to that, but her mother-in-law remained as calm as ever.

After they were finished with dinner, Harmon and Ted went to the home of one of Harmon's friends, where they played chess and drank beer until nightfall. Roberta and Jennifer were alone in the house.

"I think I'll take a nap," said Jennifer. "Those enormous dinners of yours always make me sleepy."

"Go ahead, dear," said Roberta. "I have some letters to write."

I'll bet, thought Jennifer acidly.

She went upstairs and, when Roberta peeked into the room a half hour later, Jennifer seemed to be fast asleep. Roberta closed the door quietly and went to the linen closet in the hall.

Thank God for well-oiled hinges, thought Jennifer as she opened her bedroom door.

Through the narrow opening she watched Roberta pick

up the box of soap flakes and dig for her key ring. Then she watched her tiptoe quietly down the carpeted stairs. Jennifer went to her dresser and took out the notebook, and then, just as quietly as Roberta had done, she followed her down the stairs. From the doorway to the living-room she watched Roberta unlock her desk and reach into the bottom drawer. She watched her stiffen in surprise and yank the drawer wide open and paw frantically through it. When Roberta turned Jennifer was standing very still in the doorway with the notebook in her outstretched hand.

"Is this what you were looking for?" she asked sweetly.

Roberta jumped up, her face so white that for a moment Jennifer thought that the older woman would faint.

"How did you get that?" Roberta whispered in horror.

"By unlocking your desk drawer, Mother dear," said Jennifer. "Tell me," she asked, and her lips curved in a contemptuous smile, "did you really think you could get away with it?"

"Give me that notebook!" cried Roberta.

"Not yet, Mother dear," said Jennifer with maddening calm. "You know, I wondered why you'd taken to reading murder mysteries. I'd always thought you were a real, dyed in the wool Book-of-the-Month type. But I really never guessed that you'd think up anything as dumb as this. You don't have to tell me why, either, because I know that, too."

"I don't know what you're talking about," Roberta gasped.

"Oh, yes you do," said Jennifer. She advanced slowly towards Roberta and the little smile never left her face. "You're jealous of me," she said softly. "Every time Ted and I go to bed, you're huddled in the little room next door to us and you listen to your son *make love to me* and you're so jealous you can't stand it."

Roberta staggered back towards the desk as if she had been struck.

"You're jealous," said Jennifer. "So jealous you can't stand it. You wish it was you in bed with Ted."

"You're crazy!" said Roberta and was sure that she had screamed, but her voice was nothing but a harsh whisper.

Jennifer burst out laughing. "I'm crazy!" she said. "Here. Listen to this, and we'll see who's crazy." She flipped the notebook open and began to read. "*One-thirty: Jennifer goes upstairs for nap. Two-thirty: I wake her with a cup of coffee in which sleeping powder has been dissolved. Three o'clock: I suggest a visit to the Page girls. Three-thirty: Jennifer and I get into car in garage and I start car while wearing gloves. I tell her I've forgotten my glasses and leave her there while I re-enter house. Car is still running. Four o'clock: Jennifer has fallen asleep and I move her into driver's seat and go back into house. Five-thirty: Ted and Harmon return home to find me sound asleep in bed. They discover Jennifer dead in car.*" Jennifer closed the book with a snap. "I never would have known what hit me, would I?" she asked.

Roberta had sunk down into the chair in front of the desk.

"You're evil," she was saying, over and over, "you're a bad, evil girl."

"At least I never planned to kill you," retorted Jennifer. "And now, do you know what I'm going to do?"

Roberta looked up at her stupidly.

Jennifer smiled. "I'm going upstairs to get my coat, then I'm going to take this notebook, get into your car and go directly to the sheriff." She started to walk out of the room and Roberta jumped up to follow her, just as Jennifer had known she would.

Jennifer ran upstairs with Roberta behind her, and when she reached the top she waited until her mother-in-law was standing beside her.

"Did you really think you could get away with it?" asked Jennifer tauntingly, holding out the notebook so that Roberta could almost reach it.

Roberta leaned forward to grab the notebook, and in that second, Jennifer dropped the book to the floor, put her hands against Roberta's shoulder and pushed with all her strength. Roberta fell forward with a scream and Jennifer

coolly noted that her head hit the wall twice as she fell. It seemed to take her forever to reach the bottom.

Jennifer stood still at the top of the stairs, and the only sound was the echo of Roberta's startled cry and the quiet of Jennifer's breathing. Jennifer went quietly down the stairs and stepped over Roberta's body. She bent and felt for a pulse, but she knew from the angle of Roberta's head that her mother-in-law's neck was broken and that she was dead.

Jennifer went back upstairs and burned the pages of the notebook in the bathroom sink, then she flushed the ashes down the drain. Her heart had never altered its steady beating, for she had known that she could not fail. If Roberta had not been killed by the fall, but only injured, Jennifer would still have been safe because she had the notebook with its terrible story and Roberta would never be able to tell that she had been pushed.

Jennifer smiled as the last of the ashes flowed smoothly down the drain. She went to her bedroom and took off her shoes, stockings and pantie-girdle, just as she did every Sunday afternoon when she got ready for a nap. The bed was already rumpled from when she had used it while waiting for Roberta to look in on her.

Wearing only her slip, Jennifer walked down the stairs and stepped over Roberta's body without so much as a glance. She went to the telephone and paused a minute before she picked it up. When she did, she had held her breath long enough to make her voice a gasping breath. She gave the number of Harmon's friend and when he answered she was screaming for Ted.

"An accident!" she screamed. "Your mother. Come quickly!"

Roberta Carter was buried three days later, and everyone in Peyton Place sympathized with the bereaved family.

"What a shame," said the town. "She was the soul of goodness, Roberta was."

"And how terrible for Jennifer. She and Roberta were so close. Roberta told me herself how much she thought of Ted's wife."

"I know it. Why, Roberta just lived for the time when Jennifer would have her first baby."

"It's terrible. You don't often see a mother and daughter-in-law as close as Jennifer and Roberta were."

The following Friday, Ted and Jennifer boarded the train for Boston. As Harmon said, Ted couldn't stay forever, he had his career to think of. Jennifer wore a wide-brimmed black hat with a veil that hid her little smile. Ted helped her up the steps and on to the train. Inwardly, he shuddered when he touched her. In his heart he harboured a terrible suspicion. He would spend the rest of his life—the rest of his eminently successful life—in dark wonder.

ALLISON KNEW that Lewis was dead. Even in the depths of her drugged sleep she knew it. When they had brought her broken body into the receiving room at the hospital she had been calling for Lewis, and had continued to call for him until Matt Swain arrived and injected a sedative.

Now, a week later, Constance and Mike sat by her bedside. Allison was still under drugs. Constance stared at her bruised face with tears in her eyes. According to Matt Swain's medical report, Allison had four broken ribs and a crushed collarbone and had suffered a fairly severe concussion. But Constance knew that the tortured, anguished look on Allison's face, the sudden starts, the way she turned her head, was not the result of her physical injuries. Allison was the captive of the terrible, haunting dreams of her drugged sleep.

Constance and Mike came and sat at her bedside every afternoon and evening. Matt let them come only during the regular hospital visiting hours. If he had permitted, Constance would have been there twenty-four hours a day.

"She's young. She'll heal quickly enough," Matt told Constance.

"It's not her broken bones I'm thinking about," Constance said.

"And what makes you think *I* am, Connie?" Matt blustered. "How much of a goddamn fool do you take me for?"

"I'm sorry, Matt," Connie said.

"Damn well should be," he said, and stormed off down the hospital corridor, his white coat flying out around him.

Stephanie stayed with them through the first week and then had to go to New York, promising to come back as soon as Constance or Allison needed her. When Constance said

"I know it. Why, Roberta just lived for the time when Jennifer would have her first baby."

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goodbye to her, they both cried; and Mike stood by, a helpless look on his face, saying, "Everything's going to be all right, everything's going to be all right."

It was on the second day after the accident that Mike came home with the police report, the results of what had been uncovered by the State Police's examination of the car.

"The accelerator stuck," Mike said. "Allison hasn't had enough experience as a driver to know that you just stick the toe of your shoe under it and push it up. I suspect she stepped down on it, thinking that would release it. But, of course, it didn't."

Constance sat listening quietly, with her hands in her lap.

"Judging by the tyre marks on the road," Mike went on, "the police think she then tried to stop the car by applying the brakes. It went out of control. She was probably doing eighty to ninety miles an hour by that time."

"Oh God," said Connie.

"They know where the car went off the road, but they can only guess how many times it rolled over. Four or five times, they think, until the trees stopped it."

The car was completely demolished, unsalvageable; and Lewis's body had been found inside. Allison had been thrown clear, she had fallen on the grassy bank and had slid and rolled to the bottom. A car full of teenagers had come upon the scene minutes after it happened. They had found Allison trying to pull open the buckled door of the car, trying to get to Lewis.

She knew he was dead. She threw her head from side to side on the pillow, trying to shake off the horror of her dreams. Horrible as anything else was the feeling of helplessness that came over her as the car began to career along the road, its tyres screaming. There was nothing she could do, nothing.

"Lewis," she had cried, "Lewis, what is happening?"

She remembered his hand moving slowly towards the steering wheel, to help her control the car. And then they began to turn over. That was all she remembered, but,

hour after hour, the dream of those hideous moments pursued her. And deep in her unconscious brain, at the very centre of her being, was the knowledge that Lewis was dead.

Early in the morning of her second week in the hospital, that time of day when the nurses begin to turn off lights, Allison woke and found Matt Swain watching her.

"Good morning, Allison," he said. And he spoke to her as gently as he had ever spoken to anyone in his life.

Allison began to cry, weakly; the tears welled up and spilled over and ran down her face. "Tell me, Matt," she said, her voice a cracked whisper. "Tell me."

"You know," he said.

"Tell me!"

"He is dead, Allison," Matt said.

Matt took her hand. She pulled it away. "I don't want to hear any of your consoling words, Doctor," she said. "Words aren't going to help me." Her voice was flat and dead. She closed her eyes.

"Allison," Matt said. "Allison, whether you help me or not, I am going to make you well. Make no mistake about that."

Constance brought books and magazines, and returned the next day to find them untouched. And, in the same way, the food trays brought in by the nurses were returned to the kitchen.

Matt Swain came in and stood by the foot of the bed, stood silently until Allison looked up and met his eyes. Then he said, "If what you're trying to do is commit suicide, Allison, there are simpler and less painful ways of doing it."

He waited for Allison to speak. She closed her eyes and turned her head away.

He made his voice sound rough and brutal; even he was shocked by the sound of it. "In this hospital, I'm the boss. What I say goes. When you get home, when I discharge you from this place, you can do what you like with yourself. It'll be no affair of mine. But you're not leaving here until I say so."

He put his hands behind his back and leaned forward, the stethoscope like a black noose around his neck, his white coat billowing open like a tent.

"You have your choice, Allison. You'll eat what is brought to you, what I have prescribed for you, the nourishment that will bring you back to health; or I will have your hands tied to the bed and stick needles into you and feed you intravenously. It's up to you."

He signalled the nurse who was waiting at the door with a tray of food. She rustled into the room, set down the tray and cranked up the bed. Unwillingly but inexorably, Allison was raised to a sitting position. Matt went to the window and opened the curtains, flooding the room with light. The nurse put the tray on the bed table and pushed it up to Allison.

Allison sat and looked at it, as if it were something dangerous and full of menace.

Matt said to himself, Well, if this doesn't work, I don't know what the hell I'm going to do. Aloud, he said, "This news is going to make your mother very happy, Allison."

Allison did not look at him. She picked up the spoon and slowly began to eat the broth.

Matt Swain walked out of the room. In the corridor he leaned against a wall and wiped his forehead. If you hadn't been a doctor, you'd have made a damn good actor, he said, congratulating himself.

In December, Mike came in the new car the insurance company had bought him and took Allison home. She was shaky on her feet but, with Mike's arm supporting her, she walked to the car. When Mike opened the door she began to cry; she turned her head into Mike's shoulder and sobbed, "Oh, Mike, I can't, I can't!"

Mike spoke soothing, meaningless words into her ear, like a mother crooning to a baby, and gently eased her into the car. He ran around the other side and slid under the wheel. Then, driving very slowly, he took her home.

Constance had made up the sofa in the living-room with blankets and pillows; a fire burned cheerily. Allison looked

around her, as if she had never seen this house before and was wary of it.

If only she would tell me, Constance thought, looking at her daughter, her heart breaking for Allison. If I only dared to tell her that I know.

And Allison, lying on the sofa, with Constance and Mike fussing around her, was filled with bitter thoughts. She felt that her body had betrayed her by getting well again. And that she was betraying Lewis by being alive when he was dead.

David and Stephanie wrote to her, Brad Holmes and Arthur Tishman sent messages and flowers. But she wrote to no one. She read a great deal. Constance wrote to David and Brad, and they kept a steady stream of all the new novels coming into the house. During the day she prowled around the house, walking from room to room, always returning to the sofa. The sofa had become for her the protected place.

Like Road's End when I was a girl, she thought. Road's End. It had truly been road's end for Lewis.

And sometimes she thought: Now you are free. Now you can have all the experience of life that you wanted. You can go anywhere, see everything, do anything. You are free.

And when this thought came she pushed it quickly away, repelled by it. It is like dancing on Lewis's grave, she thought, and hated herself for having such thoughts.

Two weeks before Christmas, Constance asked Allison if she'd like to have David and Stephanie up for the holidays.

Allison shook her head. "I don't want to see anyone yet," she said.

At night, Constance and Mike lay in their bed and listened to the sounds of Allison, prowling about the house, drinking coffee in the kitchen. When they came down in the morning, every morning, there was a coffee cup in the sink and a pile of books on the table. Allison only slept when she took a sleeping pill.

When Constance went to Matt Swain, all he could say

was, "I have faith in Allison. We'll just have to be patient, Connie, and bear up and see her through this bad time."

Connie nodded.

Matt said, "Connie, you can just tell me to mind my own damned business if you want to, but was there something between Allison and Lewis Jackman?"

"Mind your own damned business, Matt," Connie said, and smiled for the first time in weeks.

Looking back on it, Connie thought it was probably Matt who had broken the ice and started things moving again. She walked home with a livelier step, and when she opened the door she was struck by the stagnant odour of the house. It smells like a place where life has come to a standstill, she thought. It's wrong, it's all wrong. I must do something.

As she passed the living-room she saw Allison lying on the sofa, staring at the ceiling, her eyes full of nothingness. Connie went into the kitchen and began to heat the coffee.

She went to the living-room door and said to Allison, "I'm heating the coffee. Would you like a cup?"

"I don't care."

"Well, have one then, darling. I like company."

She filled the cups and brought them in and set them on the coffee table next to Allison's sofa. Allison sat up and Constance sat down beside her.

"It's cold out," Connie said. "And I think it's going to snow. I'll be glad when this year is over and Mike will be able to stop commuting to White River. It's only nine miles, but when winter comes I begin to worry."

Allison did not say anything.

Connie sipped her coffee. "Mmm, that tastes good. I needed something hot. Would you like some cookies?"

"No, thank you, Mother."

Connie looked up then and saw the first snowflakes flatten themselves against the windowpane. Allison followed her glance, saw the snow and got up. She went to the window and looked out.

Allison had lost weight. Her face had lost the last of its youthful flesh. Looking at her, Connie thought, You're a

begun; his determinedly cheerful presence was good for Allison. They spent hours sitting at the kitchen table talking about Allison's work, and her inability to get her second novel started.

"Maybe I've got second novel fever," Allison said.

"Could be," Mike granted. "But I think writing is like any other job. When you've been away from it for a long time, it takes a while to get back into the swing of it. You're not so different from the lumberman who has had a three months' layoff. He has to get his muscles toned up again, and you've got to get your mind and temper toned up."

"Sometimes I think I'm written out and don't have anything more to say."

Mike laughed. "If you never moved out of Peyton Place, you'd have enough material to keep you going for two lifetimes."

On Christmas Day, surrounded by the debris and litter of gift wrappings, they were having dinner when there was a sharp rapping on the door.

Mike raised his eyebrows and stood up. Constance said, "Now who can that be?"

"Probably some kids out for tricks or treats," Mike said. Bending down quickly, he kissed Constance and said, "And a Happy Hallowe'en to you, my dear."

"Oh, if I only had something to throw," Connie said, as he walked to the front door. The rapping continued and Mike shouted, "I'm coming, I'm coming."

There was a silence after the door had been opened. Then they heard Mike say, "You are either Rita Moore or the loveliest apparition I've ever seen."

Allison jumped to her feet as she heard Rita's clear, ringing laugh.

"It can't be anyone else," said Allison to her mother's inquiring look.

Rita swept into the room. She was wearing a black great-coat lined with fur, its high, wide collar framing her beautiful face that glowed with the cold.

"Well, I'm glad to see you on your feet," she said to Alli-

on. "I heard in New York that you were doing the Elizabeth Barrett Browning bit." And before Allison could answer, Rita turned to Mike and handed him the wicker hamper she was carrying. "Here, Mr MacKenzie, it's full of champagne and I don't think it will have to be cooled. That taxi I took from White River was refrigerated."

"Taxi!" Allison said. "How did you get anyone to drive you over here on Christmas Day?"

"Not only drive me over, darling. But he's going to wait at some crony's house and then drive me back in time to catch the Boston train. And it cost me only twenty-five dollars, one autograph and my best smile."

Mike stood next to her with the hamper of champagne in his hands. "You should have 'phoned, Miss Moore. I'd have been glad to come over for you."

"Oh, Mr MacKenzie," Rita said, "you are nice."

"He's like that all the time. A regular boy scout," Constance said.

"You've gathered, Rita, that these are my parents," Allison said. "Mike and Constance Rossi."

"Rossi," said Rita. She turned to Mike. "And I've been calling you MacKenzie. I am sorry."

"Oh, that's all right," Mike said. "Of course, I'd have killed anyone else." Mike took the hamper into the kitchen.

Rita joined them at the table.

"Now," Allison said, "what in the world are you doing here of all places?"

"Well, I was in New York and I heard about your smash-up and I just decided I wanted to have a good old-fashioned white Christmas dinner and so I came. Besides, I've been curious about the background of your story."

"How does it look to you?"

"It looks awfully like New England," said Rita. "Is it supposed to? I mean, when anything is so like I expect it to be, I'm sure it must be a fake."

Mike came in with the champagne and four glasses. "By the time we've finished this bottle, Miss Moore," he said,

"I'm trying to get back to work again, Rita. It just won't come."

Allison's hand was on the table. Rita reached across and tapped it with her long tapering finger. "It will come," she said, emphasizing each word with a finger tap. "It will come because it must. This is the final lesson, Allison. That is what success means for people like us—that when everything else is gone, friends and lovers and husbands, we have got our work. It's the only constant thing in our lives. And when we betray our talent, then we might as well give up and return to the original chaos."

She emptied the champagne bottle into their two glasses.

"I've got to get back to White River. My lovesick taxi-man is probably frozen to death by now. And besides, my husband is waiting for me at the White River Hotel."

"Are you married again, Rita?"

"I've been married for two weeks, child. If you weren't snowbound in the Rockies, you'd have heard about it."

"Are you happy?"

"Well," Rita said. "I don't know what's happy any more. I tell you, love, we're cosy together. We understand each other. And it's a nice change. I mean, Jim isn't a fairy and he isn't a gigolo. He's really the first husband I've had in years who works for a living. Some mornings I'm almost tempted to get up and pack his little lunch pail for him."

"I'm glad you came, Rita. You've helped me a lot," Allison said.

"Now how did I do that?" Rita asked.

"By reminding me," Allison said, "that the world isn't full of monsters waiting to cut me down. And by showing me that work will exorcize all the ghosts that haunt me."

"Here's to Love and Work," Rita said, raising her glass.

"I'll drink to that," Allison said.

The taxi horn sounded, a loud blast that shattered the silence of the snow. Mike and Constance came out of the kitchen. Mike helped Rita into her coat. She kissed Allison

"I'm going to be able to tell you just how much I adore you. Right here in front of my wife I shall tell you."

"That's the best way," Rita said. "It's no good having secrets from your wife."

"That's the way I figure it too," Mike said.

"And after the second bottle," Connie said, "you can take off your shirt and show our guest your tattoo. You know, dear—the one with the beard that says 'Rita and Mike Forever'."

"You mustn't be edgy, dear," said Mike to Connie. "I plan on going off with Miss Moore for only a year or two. But I am definitely coming back to you."

"That's what I call devotion," Connie said. And she was thinking, I could kiss you, Rita Moore. Because Allison was laughing. She was alive again, and it was because of Rita, walking into the house so unexpectedly, and bringing with her the bracing air of the outside world.

It was the world that Allison had been trying to hide from, that she had been unwilling and afraid to face. It had brought her a success that frightened her, and a love that had ended in tragedy.

When they had finished the second bottle, Connie said to Rita, "I know this will break your heart, but I'm going to take Mike away now. I think you'll want to spend some time alone with Allison."

"I suspect I'm being taken off to the kitchen to be put to work." He headed towards the kitchen door, saying, "The next sound you hear will be the sound of breaking china."

"They're nice," Rita said. "You've had more luck than most of us, Allison."

Allison made a gesture with her hand, as if to say, That's what you think, and she smiled a bitter smile.

"Full of self-pity, aren't you, kid? You smashed up and your man got killed, and now you're hurt because the whole world didn't crumple up and die with you. And if you stay here much longer, it'll go right on without you, for good and all."

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The taxi horn sounded, a loud blast that shattered the silence of the snow. Mike and Constance came out of the kitchen. Mike helped Rita into her coat. She kissed Allison

odbye. "There are a lot of people working for you, love. I won't ever forget that."

Allison went to the window and watched Rita walk down the snow-filled walk to the waiting taxi. She felt the cold through the glass and leaned her head against it.

I won't forget, Allison said. And I won't disappoint you.

She stood at the window and watched till Rita's taxi was out of sight, then she went to the kitchen door and looked in on Mike and her mother.

"I'll be up in my room, working, if you want me for anything," Allison said.

Constance smiled. "I think we'll manage, dear."

They watched her walk up the stairs to her room. Constance sighed her relief, and as Mike took her in his arms, she said "Happy New Year, darling. I have the feeling it's going to be a good year."

